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NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIRST CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

APRIL 13, 1989

Printed for the use of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Serial No. 101-7

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

98-027 ≈ WASHINGTON : 1989

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, Congressional Sales Office
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CONTENTS

April 13, 1989

	Page
National Cemetery System	1

OPENING STATEMENTS

Chairman Staggers	1
Hon. Dan Burton	3

WITNESSES

Adams, Maj. Gen. A.J., secretary, American Battle Monuments Commission	7
Prepared statement of General Adams	53
Brown, Jerry J., chairman, veterans cemetery committee, National Concrete Burial Vault Association	26
Prepared statement of Mr. Brown	82
Christian, Richard, deputy director, National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Committee, the American Legion	21
Prepared statement of Mr. Christian	67
Costanzo, Raymond J., superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery	5
Prepared statement of Mr. Costanzo	46
De George, Frank R., associate legislative director, Paralyzed Veterans of America	22
Prepared statement of Mr. DeGeorge	72
Hamerschlag, Arthur S., Deputy Director, National Cemetery System, Department of Veterans Affairs	4
Prepared statement of Mr. Hamerschlag	37
Johnson, Richard W., Jr., director of legislative affairs, Non Commissioned Officers Association	19
Prepared statement of Mr. Johnson,	60
Magill, James N., director, National Legislative Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars	23
Prepared statement of Mr. Magill	74
Schultz, Richard F., associate national legislative director, Disabled American Veterans	20
Prepared statement of Mr. Schultz	63
Watkins, James E., Jr., on behalf of the American Cemetery Association, accompanied by Stephen L. Morgan, executive vice president of the American Cemetery Association	25
Prepared statement of Mr. Watkins	76

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Letter:	
Maj. Gen. A.J. Adams, to Chairman Montgomery, re views of the ABMC on H.R. 1414	59
Statements:	
Hon. Gerald B.H. Solomon	84
Hon. Lewis F. Payne	85
Hon. Martin Frost	86
Written committee questions and their response:	
Hon. Dan Burton to Secretary Edward J. Derwinski, Department of Veterans Affairs	89

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

Thursday, April 13, 1989

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS,
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:37 a.m., in room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Harley O. Staggers, Jr. (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Staggers, Jones, Parker, Burton, and Smith of New Hampshire.

Also Present: Representative Kennedy.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN STAGGERS

Mr. STAGGERS. The subcommittee will come to order.

I would like to welcome everyone this morning as we address the key issues relating to the operation of our Nation's cemetery system. The subcommittee's jurisdiction extends over the National Cemetery System administered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Arlington National Cemetery, which is administered by the Department of the Army, and the overseas cemeteries and memorials, maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Over 40 percent of the 113 cemeteries in the National Cemetery System are closed to new interments. I am deeply concerned, as I know a number of the members of this subcommittee are, about the ability of the system to adequately provide short- and long-term burial benefits for eligible veterans.

In June, 1987, a study of the National Cemetery System was submitted to Congress in accordance with Public Law 99–576. The study presented the current policy of expansion based upon the regional concept and made five recommendations for meeting veterans' future burial needs: (1) encourage expanded participation in the State Veterans' Cemetery Grants Program; (2) phased development of presently undeveloped land in open national cemeteries; (3) expansion of the garden niche concept; (4) limited expansion of existing national cemeteries through acquisition of adjacent land; and (5), the last one, review the policy for future expansion of the National Cemetery System.

Although the Congress has patiently awaited the results of the policy for future expansion and has contacted the administration several times in this regard, we have now been advised that the regional concept would remain the policy of the National Cemetery System.

Yet, it should be pointed out that the 1987 study projected that the annual veteran deaths will increase from an estimated 426,800 in 1987 to 610,600 in 2010. Cumulative veteran deaths between 1987 and 2020 are expected to be almost 19 million, or 68 percent of all presently living veterans. This obviously will not only have a tremendous impact on service requirements, but it is estimated that between 1987 and 2000, 21 cemeteries will close. An additional 15 cemeteries are projected to close between the years 2000 and 2020.

It should also be noted that from 1983 to 1990, interment and grave site maintenance work loads have increased 35.4 percent and 19.1 percent respectively. Despite these increases, average wage grade employment has increased only 4.1 percent. In addition to these increased work loads, the Department of Veterans Affairs has activated cemeteries in Fort Mitchell, AL, Bushnell, FL, and Pruntytown, WV. We must continue to ensure quality of standards in our national cemeteries and employment levels must remain responsive to veterans' needs.

Public Law 100–322 authorized the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide grave liners at national cemeteries. Under this authority, the Department of Memorial Affairs is providing these at four additional national cemeteries. It has been stated that this change in policy not only enhances the esthetics at our national cemetery but saves maintenance money in the long run. It is my intent to explore the feasibility of providing grave liners at other national cemeteries.

We will also focus this morning on the operation of the Arlington National Cemetery. This cemetery is under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Army rather than the Department of Veterans Affairs. Eligibility for interment is limited in this cemetery and it is my intent to explore whether or not Arlington's burial criteria should be consistent with the National Cemetery System.

Lastly, we will focus on the operations of the American Battle Monuments Commission and legislative proposals which would affect the Commission. I would like your comments on H.R. 1414, a bill which would provide for the appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Forces to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

It is also my understanding that Chairman Montgomery re-introduced legislation just this last week to exempt retired members of the Armed Forces called to active duty with the American Battle Monuments Commission from grade limitations on officers of the Armed Forces. Last year, the committee favorably marked up similar legislation, but the House Armed Services Committee did not move on the measure. It is my intention to ask the American Battle Monuments Commission whether or not they still support this measure.

Before I call up the first panel of witnesses, I would like to recognize the ranking minority member of the subcommittee, the Honorable Dan Burton, for his comments.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DAN BURTON

Mr. BURTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate very much you calling me "honorable". Is everybody awake out there?

[Laughter.]

Mr. Chairman, as American's veterans grow older, it is important that we determine the present condition and future needs of the Department of Veterans Affairs cemetery system. While the Department of Memorial Affairs is the smallest in the DVA, the Department oversees and administers the most compassionate benefit provided to our veterans.

We must accept the challenge of ensuring that the Department of Veterans Affairs cemetery system continues to provide a dignified burial for the men and women who so courageously gave their lives in service to our free Nation, and to honor and maintain their graves. The cemetery system has served the needs of our veterans for 127 years in an efficient and noble manner. The current administration budget proposal to restrict payment of plot allowances is inconsistent with the promises made in the past to our veterans. It is the duty of this committee to ensure continued use of cemetery benefits by veterans and ease the burden of surviving families. Plans must continue to expand the current 113 cemeteries in the National Cemetery System and place new facilities in areas which follow demographic trends. Environmental impact studies are in progress for cemeteries in four major population centers. With the dedication of each new cemetery, this committee and Nation can be proud of keeping the promises which were made to our servicemen, that an honorable and dignified burial is the right of every veteran.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling this hearing to allow testimony on the National Cemetery System from our distinguished witnesses. Examining the issues and preparing for the needs of our veterans today will give the Nation time to plan a strategy and determine our options for tomorrow. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and our colleagues in the effort to provide for the memory of our veterans, with the dignity and honor that they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you, Dan.

Dan mentioned my calling him "honorable". I can think of no more honorable man in the Congress and I thank him for his comments. Obviously, we agree on the goals, and this should be an easy subcommittee to work on for the rest of the year.

Mr. BURTON. Yes, sir.

Mr. STAGGERS. Before we get started, Mr. Solomon had requested that he be allowed to submit a statement for the record. Without objection, so ordered.

[The statement of Hon. Gerald Solomon appears at p. 87.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Also, for all the panels—Dan, would you make a unanimous consent request that all statements be made a part of the record?

Mr. BURTON. So move, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection, your statements will be made a part of the record, so that you can summarize. They will be part of

the full record. There may be additional written questions that we will submit to you for the record.

The first panel will be made of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Arlington National Cemetery and the American Battle Monuments Commission. I would ask Arthur Hamerschlag, Raymond Costanzo, and Maj. Gen. A.J. Adams, if they would please come forward.

Mr. Hamerschlag, we would be honored to hear your testimony first.

STATEMENTS OF ARTHUR S. HAMERSCHLAG, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS; RAYMOND J. COSTANZO, SUPERINTENDENT, ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY; AND MAJ. GEN. A.J. ADAMS, SECRETARY, AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

STATEMENT OF ARTHUR S. HAMERSCHLAG

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Thank you very much. Just let me say I am pleased to be here this morning to give you an update on the National Cemetery System. With your permission, and at your suggestion, I will give a brief summary of the formal testimony.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. The National Cemetery System has a three-part mission established by law: to operate VA national cemeteries, to provide grave markers for national and State veterans cemeteries and for veterans graves in private cemeteries, and to administer the State cemetery grants program. Beginning with fiscal year 1990, we will also assume responsibilities for the Presidential Memorial Certificate Program. Under this program, the next-of-kin of any honorably discharged veteran may receive a certificate expressing the Nation's gratitude for the veteran's military service. This program was previously administered by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

Today, there are 113 cemeteries in the National Cemetery System. The most recent addition is the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona, in Phoenix. This was formerly a State veterans cemetery. As provided by Public Law 100–322, VA assumed responsibility for operation of this cemetery on April 1 of this year. I am pleased to say this Saturday there will be a special ceremony commemorating the transfer of the cemetery to the National Cemetery System.

Of the 113 VA national cemeteries, 68 are open to new interments and 45 are closed. During the last fiscal year, there were a record 56,216 interments in the system. The number of interments has been rising steadily and is expected to continue increasing as the veteran population ages.

A new national cemetery is under development to serve the large veteran population in northern California. This has been named the San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery. The environmental impact statement and master plan have been completed and the project is in the working drawing stage. We expect to open this 114th national cemetery in mid-1991.

As directed in the fiscal year 1988 continuing resolution, the VA is conducting environmental impact statements at four locations

which were identified as priority areas for new national cemeteries. These are Chicago, Cleveland, Seattle/Tacoma, and Albany. Draft reports are expected in 10 to 12 months. Resources for actually building these cemeteries are not included in the President's fiscal year 1990 budget request.

Public Law 100-322 also authorized the use of grave liners at VA national cemeteries. Grave liners are rigid outer containers which help reduce grave sinkage, prevent headstones from tilting, and generally improve the efficiency and appearance of the cemetery grounds. We have been providing grave liners at four cemeteries: Calverton, NY, Riverside, CA, Bourne, MA, and Bushnell, FL. Based on an independent cost-benefit study, we have now added five additional cemeteries to the grave liner program: Houston, Fort Sam Houston, Fort Snelling, Fort Logan and Willamette. This program will be expanded at a measured pace, where it is shown to be cost-effective.

The headstone and marker program is also showing record work load levels. Last year, there were 293,000 markers ordered, a 27-percent increase over the yearly average for the last 15 years. A successful automation program has helped us improve the timeliness of our response in providing markers and to be responsive to individual cases.

Under the State Cemetery Grants Program, there are now 18 States and one territory which have applied for Federal funding. Upon completion, all States but six will have an open national or State veterans cemetery.

That concludes my summary, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hamerschlag appears on p. 37.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you. We will save questions until the panel is through.

Mr. Costanzo, if you could please address the committee.

STATEMENT OF RAYMOND J. COSTANZO

Mr. COSTANZO. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of this subcommittee. I am Ray Costanzo, Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery. I am appearing on behalf of the Secretary of the Army, who is responsible for the operations of Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. Chairman, with your approval, I will summarize my report and submit the full statement for the record.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection, all statements will be entered into the record.

Mr. COSTANZO. Thank you.

From its origin during the Civil War, Arlington National Cemetery has become a great national and military shrine. This 1,100 acre estate, which comprises Arlington National Cemetery and the Fort Myer military reservation, has a rich historical background. It became the property of John Parke Custis in 1778 and descended to his son, George Washington Parke Custis, who built the handsome, Greek revival mansion, now known as Arlington House. The house and grounds were owned by the Robert E. Lee family at the out-

break of the Civil War, when the house was taken over by the Government for military purposes.

The establishment of the cemetery dates from 1864. Over the years, representatives of all the Nation's wars and conflicts have been buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Prominent among the memorials in Arlington National Cemetery are the Arlington Memorial Amphitheater and the Tomb, where the remains of the unknowns from World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict and the Vietnam era are interred. The Tomb is a hallowed and cherished shrine, where placement of wreaths by veterans' organizations, foreign dignitaries and representatives of schools, religious groups and civil and fraternal organizations has become a tribute of respect of all the Nation's heroes.

Arlington is also the final resting place of two former Presidents, President Taft and President Kennedy. The unique nature of Arlington cemetery as a national as well as a military shrine is well recognized. At the close of fiscal year 1988, the remains of 210,409 persons were interred and/or inurned in Arlington National Cemetery. Of this total, 202,146 persons were interred and 8,263 remains were inurned in the Columbarium.

In fiscal year 1988, services were conducted for 4,344 persons, which included 69 general and flag officers. Fiscal year 1989 and 1990 burials and inurnments are projected to be 4,450 and 4,750, respectively. Approximately 16 interments are accomplished daily. At the present rate of burial, it is projected the cemetery will not be filled until approximately the year 2020.

The second 5,000 niche unit of the Columbarium was opened in April of 1986 to accommodate the inurnment of cremated remains of honorably discharged veterans. Design and construction funds for the next 10,000 niche increment were approved for fiscal year 1989, and construction is anticipated for July of 1989. Construction of a new visitors center and parking facility began late in 1986. These new facilities, much needed to better serve the visiting public and at the same time reducing interference with funeral services, were opened in January, 1989.

With the opening of this new facility, a paid parking system was initiated. Under this plan, all visitors utilizing the parking facilities will be charged a nominal parking fee. All funds received from this operation will be returned to the U.S Treasury to pay back the cost of construction. Friends and relatives who visit their loved ones grave sites are not required to pay any fees whatsoever.

Now, in addition to its principal function as a national cemetery, Arlington is also the site of many, nonfuneral ceremonies each year. In fiscal year 1988, 2,449 such ceremonies were conducted. A like number of ceremonies is anticipated for fiscal year 1989 and 1990.

The President of the United States, 14 foreign heads of States, governors and other high-ranking military and political officials participated in these ceremonies during fiscal year 1988. Arlington National Cemetery has approximately 4 million visitors annually and is one of the most visited sites in the National Capital Region.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Department of the Army fully supports Public Law 100-322 as it applies to the use of grave liners at Arlington National Cemetery. Numerous studies have conclusively

established that the use of grave liners would reduce maintenance costs and, more importantly, would enhance cemetery appearance by stabilizing the headstone alignment.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. I will be pleased to respond to your questions, sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Costanzo appears at p. 46.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

General Adams, would you be kind enough to share your comments with us.

STATEMENT OF MAJ. GEN. A.J. ADAMS

General ADAMS. Mr. Chairman, we thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and the other members of the committee.

Last year, the value of the dollar continued to fall on the foreign markets where our installations are located. Losses to the Commission as a result were $1,244,000. Fortunately, sufficient funds remained in the fiscal year 1987 supplement appropriation for currency fluctuation to offset such losses. Our current appropriation contains $829,000 specifically for this purpose.

These funds have been transferred to the Treasury and placed in our foreign currency fluctuation account. During the first quarter of the current year, the dollar has remained fairly stable and close to our budgeted exchange rates. If the value of the dollar declines further, we will have to draw on the foreign currency fluctuation account.

The Commission's appropriation request for 1990 is $14,507,000, of which $14,007,00 is for salaries and expenses, and $500,000 is for partial construction of the Korean War Veterans Memorial. The request is $412,000 less than the recently amended fiscal 1989 appropriation request. This appropriation request, assuming approval, will not—I repeat—not reduce our backlog of maintenance and capital improvement projects of $6.5 million.

Public Law 100-687 last year authorized us to restore and maintain the Pacific War Memorial on Corregidor Island in the Philippines. Implementation is conditional on an agreement between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States. No action will be taken on this project until the agreement is signed and funds and personnel are made available.

Work on the Guadalcanal Monument is progressing satisfactorily and we expect the monument to be completed early next year.

Good progress is being made on the Korean War Veterans Memorial. To date, more than 37,000 donors have contributed over $3 million. This is over half of the overall design, maintenance and construction cost. A superb site on the Mall, Ash Woods, has been approved for the memorial. It is adjacent to the Lincoln Memorial and directly across the Reflecting Pool from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. A design competition opened to all Americans 18 years of age or older is well underway. The winners of the competition will be announced by June 1, 1989, at which time the action to obtain the necessary design approvals will begin. We hope to award the construction contract by the middle of 1990, if the entire construction and maintenance costs have been raised.

Like our World War I Cemeteries, the use of most of the World War II sites as permanent burial grounds was granted in perpetuity without change or taxation by the host countries. Three exceptions are the inclusion of the cemetery in Manila in the status-of-forces agreement with the Philippines which causes us, in effect, to be paying the government of the Philippines for the use of the land; the failure of the government of Panama to ratify our cemetery agreement as part of the Panama Canal Treaty; and lastly, Tunisia which has yet to sign a formal agreement.

Since 1976, the Department of Defense has frequently raised objections to supporting the requirement for military personnel for the American Battle Monuments Commission. Legislation has been introduced on several occasions by Senator Thurmond and Congressman Montgomery to remedy the situation by exempting from DOD grade limitations those officers recalled from retirement for full-time duty with the Commission on a reimbursable basis. As recently as in February, 1987, Mr. Montgomery introduced such legislation in H.R. 733, but it was not enacted by the 100th Congress.

All officers on duty with the Commission have retired from active duty and have been recalled to duty for the specific purpose of working with the American Battle Monuments Commission. Due to their age, and the fact that they have served the maximum statutory time on normal active duty, they are not eligible for assignment to duty with the active forces. Their experience, knowledge and expertise is at a very slight cost to the Government and is invaluable to the continuity and effective performance of the Commission in accomplishing its unique responsibilities.

Legislation similar to H.R. 733 would restore the use of our military grades to the Department of Defense, while at the same time allowing us to maintain our retired, recalled military staff. As the officers are not available to DOD, they should not be charged against its authorization. Everyone seems to have agreed for years with what such legislation proposes, but it simply has not happened.

That concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. We would be glad to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Adams appears at p. 53.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you. I do have a few questions and will start in the order in which you testified.

Mr. Hamerschlag, you state that grave liners have been approved for five additional cemeteries. Why have you not provided grave liners at more cemeteries? I mean, is there a general reason? What can we do to help out?

Mr. HAMMERSCHLAG. If I might, I would like to describe the process we go through.

Those funds now are apportioned to us from OMB and they are limited by name of cemetery, in addition to amount, before we can expand the grave liner program. What we are doing now is getting actual bids at a cemetery. Once we have those bids, we do a cost analysis, which in many respects duplicates the cost benefit done by our independent contractor. We then provide that information to OMB, and if they approve it, they will give us additional funds and approval to expand the program into that cemetery.

At those cemeteries where we have gone through that process, we have received OMB approval. However, it is a time-consuming and cumbersome process. We go at it one by one. If those are the conditions under which we must work, we will continue our effort and expand the program at our larger cemeteries as best we can. I think it's just a time-consuming kind of process.

Mr. STAGGERS. Is there anything the subcommittee or full committee can do to help speed up that process?

Mr. HAMMERSCHLAG. I don't know if there is anything you can do, per se.

I guess I would like to make an observation, and that is that the cost-benefit study already done basically indicated that any time we could get bids under $100 in a cemetery with 550 burials a year or more, then it would be cost effective to use them at those cemeteries. So, in a sense, I feel like the process we're going through now is duplicating the study that has already been done.

In addition, I would like to point out that our policy as of right now is to use grave liners only where they are purely cost effective, and that is cemeteries that have interments of 550 or more.

The cost-benefit study pointed out there was a benefit to grave liners other than just saving maintenance cost, and that is the appearance of the cemetery itself. Although it did not try to quantify in dollar values what the improved appearance was worth, it certainly made the point that there was some value there, and that that perhaps should also be taken under consideration in determining in what cemeteries we should use grave liners.

Mr. STAGGERS. At the subcommittee's budget hearing we had, you indicated that an additional 38 FTE would be necessary to meet your manpower needs, as described by your work load standards. I note that in 1989 you were appropriated $9 million for the State cemetery grant program. I would note, also, that you're requesting $4.4 million in fiscal year 1994.

Do you think some of these funds will be carried over in future years?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Well, as you know, the grant funds were available to us for three years. I would not think that all of those $4.4 million that we've asked for in fiscal year 1990 would be obligated to FY 1990. Probably a substantial amount would be carried over to 1991 and 1992.

Mr. STAGGERS. Would it be possible to take the money from the State cemetery grants program and apply it towards the employment, the additional FTE's that are needed?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. If I understand your question correctly, we don't have authority to move money from one appropriation to another. But if your question is could that money be appropriated in a different manner to give us additional employment, I would say, if we need the additional employment, it would be wise to find an offset for it, given the budget stringencies we all know exist. I think, given the fact that $4.4 million would not all be obligated in FY 1990, that would be a sensible place to look.

Mr. STAGGERS. So you would agree that would be sensible, something we should consider?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Given the fact that I think we are falling behind in maintenance in our cemeteries and so on, that would be helpful to us, yes.

Mr. STAGGERS. If a State wanted to simply erect a columbarium for the veterans' cremated remains, rather than to establish a large State veterans cemetery, would they be able to utilize the State cemetery grants program?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. We have only had one indication of interest. New Hampshire filed what we call a notice of intent, indicating some interest in receiving a State cemetery grant. Their question was, would they be allowed to receive grant money for a columbarium only. Quite frankly, we expressed some concerns about that. Our reasoning is not to be difficult but that there are about 138,000 veterans in New Hampshire, and that is one of only six States that does not have either an open State or national cemetery.

We certainly would encourage New Hampshire to apply for a grant, but our concern would be that if they build a columbarium only, then are they truly going to serve the needs of all the veterans of the State or only those who choose to be cremated. I know there was a lot of interest in the State. They looked for some land and were not successful, but I think only about 20 or 25 acres would be needed there. It would seem to me it would be worthwhile for the State to make a real effort to try to find that land and apply not only for a columbarium but also grant funds to develop a full cemetery.

Mr. STAGGERS. You state that one of your initiatives is to improve the classification standard used for grading cemetery directors positions. Is it true that in some instances wage grade employees can make the same amount of money as a cemetery director?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. In some cases they may make more. Yes, that is true.

Mr. STAGGERS. One last question—I know my time is up, but being chairman does have some privileges. It is my understanding that you do not inter veterans in national cemeteries during weekends. I understand the budgetary constraints under which you're operating, but we have received some complaints in certain areas where a veteran cannot then be buried on a Monday.

What can be done to remedy that type of situation?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. I think that's a good question and it's an area of concern we're aware of.

In the Atlanta area right now, which is our southeastern part of the country, we are operating what I would call a couple of pilot programs that would really incorporate two features: one would be to improve the information that's available on our recorded messages at the cemetery offices, so that if a funeral home calls, they have much better information on what the procedures would be. In addition, at one cemetery—we're looking at expanding this to others—we have a locked box procedure, whereby a funeral home can come by and drop discharge papers and so on into a locked box and can basically schedule themselves a funeral on Monday. If a funeral is already scheduled, those will be noted. But a funeral director can basically come in and write on a board "I want an 11 o'clock funeral." Then all that there would be left for us to do on

Monday would be to verify the discharge papers and go ahead and conduct the service.

I think if we're given a little bit of time to test out these procedures and perhaps improve or perfect them, this is something we would like to expand the use of significantly throughout the system.

Mr. STAGGERS. If you could keep us posted on how that's working out, so that we know that is being corrected—it does sound like you're taking care of the problem.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. We will be very happy to keep you apprised of the progress and how we're implementing that program.

Mr. STAGGERS. My time has concluded. I may have some further questions, but let me move to the other members of the panel. My colleague, Dan Burton, had to leave, and, without objection, Kingston Smith will ask some questions for the minority.

But, before Mr. Smith, since we do have Ben Jones here, a sitting member, why don't we proceed by allowing him to ask questions first. I know it's appropriate, but he does have seniority.

Mr. KINGSTON SMITH. Certainly, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Ben, do you have any questions?

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I ask questions, I just wanted to say, on behalf of the 76,000 veterans in the Fourth District of Georgia, which I serve, I would like to thank you for the hard work that you do for us, also. Your credo is to preserve and perfect the sacred grounds of the national cemeteries, and I think that our goals here are obviously similar. We look forward to working with you in that effort.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Thank you.

Mr. JONES. I had a question for Mr. Costanzo about Arlington. You mentioned that there are more restrictive eligibility requirements that have been in effect there since 1967. I wonder if you could outline for us what those requirements are.

Mr. COSTANZO. Yes, sir, I will be happy to go over them with you.

There are several different categories of individuals who are eligible for burial in Arlington National Cemetery. The first, of course, is any person whose death occurs while serving on active duty in the military services. Secondly, retired military personnel, those who have devoted their entire life to the military and have gone on to retirement after 20 years or more of service. The third category are honorably discharged veterans who held national elective office—that would be President, Vice President, Congressmen and Senators, and also honorably discharged veterans who have held appointed positions at Level I or II in the Executive Service. Also, any honorably discharged veteran who has received any one of the following decorations for valor—the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, Air Force Cross, Silver Star, Purple Heart—and any honorably discharged veterans separated for service-connected disability rated at 30 percent or more.

Now, in addition to that, we have at Arlington National Cemetery a columbarium, where the cremated remains of any honorably discharged veterans may be inurned.

I believe I've covered them all, sir.

Mr. JONES. Thank you.

I wonder if I might ask your opinion, that there does seem to be a certain irony in that there is this sort of exclusivity in death, because so many people served with valor. This precludes burial there for a lot of men and women who served gallantly in Vietnam and World War II.

Mr. COSTANZO. Yes, sir.

Mr. JONES. I just wonder, since we're opening a new cemetery at Quantico, if this might change or lift some of those restrictions and what your feelings on that are.

Mr. COSTANZO. The National Cemetery Act of 1973, Public Law 93-43, required that the Department of the Army and the Veterans' Administration conduct a joint study regarding the eligibility criteria for burial in Arlington, and that the joint study be submitted to Congress. This study was completed and submitted to Congress February 1974 with two principal recommendations, one being that the restricted eligibility for Arlington remain unchanged, and the second, that a new national cemetery be constructed in the National Capital Region.

The new national cemetery to be under the jurisdiction of the Veterans' Administration so that those veterans who are not eligible for Arlington could be buried in this new cemetery. The new VA cemetery at Quantico, Virginia was opened in 1983. The restrictive eligibility at Arlington was then more rigid than that which I had just outlined. In 1978, the Department of the Army reviewed the eligibility criteria, and at that time relaxed it to include those veterans who received the decorations for valor which I mentioned earlier and also disabled veterans.

Also, in 1980, the Army opened the first segment of the columbarium, so that all honorably discharged veterans are eligible to be inured at Arlington. We are constantly reviewing the eligibility criteria, and if there are areas where we could further relax it and still maintain the other vital cemetery functions such as the ceremonial and visitor requirements, we would relax it further. However, at the present time, there are no plans to make any additional changes.

Mr. JONES. Regarding grave liners, you made the case for grave liners at Arlington.

Mr. COSTANZO. Yes, sir.

Mr. JONES. It is not happening. I wonder what we can do to make it happen.

Mr. COSTANZO. I think you've done everything that needs to be done in the enactment of the legislation. We are proceeding, through the OMB channels, to request the necessary funds to implement that program at Arlington. We hope to do that in fiscal year 1991.

Mr. JONES. Thank you very much, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Smith.

Mr. KINGSTON SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hamerschlag, at page 5 of your statement you noted that resources for design and construction of cemeteries at Chicago, Cleveland, Seattle/Tacoma and Albany are not included in the President's fiscal year 1990 budget request.

Did the VA, in it's 1990 budget submission to OMB, request funding for design and construction at those sites, and if not, is it customary practice to wait until after site selection to request design and construction funding?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. We did not request funding, and to be perfectly clear on this, I need to say we didn't request funding for two reasons. One, it would be too early in the process to request construction funds. The site has not been selected and there is no way to estimate any sort of design or what kind of funds would be needed.

I think, more importantly, the second point is that we did not request funds, nor would we plan to, given administration policy, which is not to expand the National Cemetery System beyond the regional concept. So while we're committed to completing the EIS's, at this point we would have no plans to request funding for construction.

Mr. KINGSTON SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. Costanzo, will at some future date the parking fees at Arlington be terminated when the construction costs for the parking facility has been fully amortized?

Mr. COSTANZO. Sir, the language of the appropriation that granted us the funds to construct that facility required that the fee structure be such that the payback for construction costs be accomplished in 16 years. Theoretically, that is when they're supposed to stop.

Now, realistically, I don't know if that will happen 16 years from now.

Mr. KINGSTON SMITH. Thank you.

General Adams, does the American Battle Monuments Commission have a position on the legislation which would allow former enlisted personnel to be members of the Commission?

General ADAMS. Yes. We see absolutely no reason why they shouldn't be. They are ex-enlisted men on the Commission at the present time, and we see absolutely no reason why there should not be enlisted men or ex-enlisted men on the Commission.

Mr. KINGSTON SMITH. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chairman, we will have other questions that we would like to submit for the record, if there's no objection.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection, we are going to inform this panel and the other panels that are here that there may be additional questions in writing. I understand that Mr. Jones may have additional questions.

Mr. JONES. Thank you, yes.

General Adams, in regard to the Pacific War Memorial on Corregidor, I wonder if you could tell us if the United States and the Philippines are close to a formal agreement on that.

General ADAMS. Well, I think the answer is both yes and no. The main point of controversy at the present time is the length of time in which the agreement will permit the United States to use the land to operate the memorial on Corregidor. At the present time, the Philippines want to limit this period to 25 years, which in our opinion is absolutely unrealistic.

The place is a mess right now. It's deteriorated, weeds have grown up, buildings are falling down. It would take many millions

of dollars and much time to get it back in shape. In 25 years, we may be just getting it into the desired condition. So we are, in complete agreement with Mr. Montgomery—we support him—we would accept no less than a 50-year renewable agreement, and preferably, as with most all other memorials, the use of Corregidor as a memorial in perpetuity. But the Filipinos, up to now, have not agreed.

Mr. JONES. Thank you.

In regard to the Korean War Memorial, I wonder what's being done to solicit additional contributions so that the erection of that memorial can be done in a timely way. You said the winners of the design competition are going to be announced on June 1. I wonder how many entries have been received so far and how many designs are going to be considered as part of the final competition on that.

General ADAMS. One-thousand and nineteen competitors have registered. All entries reviewed, of course, will be considered. We anticipate about 500 submissions. It's going to be a difficult job for the advisory board to go through 500 entries and come up with number one. But I am certain they can do it.

Mr. JONES. There is a screening process of elimination, I assume, that will cut it down significantly.

General ADAMS. Yes.

Mr. JONES. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about the establishment of the stone memorial on Guadalcanal.

General ADAMS. I didn't understand you.

Mr. JONES. On Guadalcanal, there is going to be a stone memorial established, I understand.

General ADAMS. Yes. That memorial is being expected in cooperation with the Guadalcanal—Solomon Islands War Memorial Foundation. This Commission will erect 24-foot monuments. The Foundation will provide the site development.

Mr. JONES. Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Smith, do you have any questions of the witnesses?

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Not at this point, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Parker I know has some questions. He visited the national cemetery in Houston on March 20, and he brought it to my attention. I know he has some questions for Mr. Hamerschlag.

Mr. Parker, you're recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I did enjoy the trip to Houston.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. I'm glad to hear that.

Mr. PARKER. I learned a great deal. We were looking at housing, but we also went by the cemetery there. As one of the few funeral directors in Congress, I know a little bit about cemeteries.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. We're happy to have you up here with us.

Mr. PARKER. There is one thing in particular that I'm interested in. During our visit to the Houston national cemetery, we noticed they were doing a lot a changes and I was very impressed with what they're doing. We've got a tremendous investment down there. They had to take down part of the fence in the front, and it was necessary to take it down. It was a cyclone fence.

Now, there are a couple of reasons that I bring this up. One of the reasons I'm concerned about the fence is because of the symbolism. I mean, we're spending a tremendous amount of money as far as the investment on this piece of property, and the symbolism of a national cemetery is very important, I believe, for America. I believe all of us understand what the symbolism really is and what it means to us. But also, there is such a thing as protection.

It is my understanding that there has been some discussion as far as the type of fence that is going to be put back. Now, with the amount of investment we have in the cemetery down there, a cyclone fence is not what needs to go back. That's my own personal opinion. I don't think it looks appropriate; I don't think it matches the flavor of the entire cemetery. I believe that personally something better needs to go up there, not only from the standpoint of appearance but also from the standpoint of protection. Because the cemetery is open. You're talking about vandalism, people coming in, and there are going to be upright markers that are allowed in parts of the cemetery, which they're opening up a section of the cemetery.

What plans do you have as far as putting up that fence?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Well, the short answer is we plan to put one up. The——

Mr. PARKER. What type of fence are you going to put up?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG [continuing]. The longer answer is, if I may—and we were very pleased to have you visit. We're very proud of our cemeteries and we're always pleased if a Member has the time and interest to stop by. Truly, we're interested in the opinion of any Member. You won't be surprised to know that after your visit word of your interest in the fence came up the line.

We do have, in essence, two proposals. One is to put up a cyclone fence, and the other would be to put up more of a wrought iron type fence, consistent with our investment in the cemetery and with the appearance that I think we all would like the cemetery to have. Our cost estimates are about $30,000 for that. I think funding is available for that within the project funds that are there. I think I can fairly comfortably commit myself to saying that we will get that fence put up.

Mr. PARKER. Okay. I want the fence up, but personally, I don't want a cyclone fence.

First of all, when you come in that cemetery, you have a beautiful gate there. It has the wrought iron gate opening there.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Right.

Mr. PARKER. Cyclone fence does not match anything at all. I think it detracts from the cemetery. When you go inside the cemetery, you don't find a cyclone fence quality throughout the cemetery. I think it's important that we do put up something that will last and will also give the correct appearance. So I want to go on record that I really favor going with a wrought iron fence.

And you're only talking about part of it. The other part of the fence has not been taken down yet, but it will be coming down later when the trees are planted out there, I understand.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. That's correct.

Mr. PARKER. I would think that needs to match, also.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. If I might, I would like to go on record to say that we hear you loud and clear. With your permission, we would like to keep you posted on the progress of that.

Mr. PARKER. Let me mention one other thing. I was very impressed with your staff. Your staff down there is very considerate and very courteous. They do an extremely effective job. They know what they're talking about. They have a lot of innovative ideas, as far as working with the cemetery down there. I was very impressed all the way around. But I wanted you to know you have an extremely good staff down there.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. I very much appreciate that.

If I might say, we are pleased with our staff not only there but basically throughout the system we have a group of people who are committed to the mission and who really want to excel at it. That is something we're all very proud of and want to maintain that spirit within our ranks.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Are there any other questions? Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for being late, and apologize to you gentlemen as well.

I was trying to get some specific information before I asked you the question, Mr. Hamerschlag. But since I don't have it, I will ask it. It's an easy question, so you can give me the easy answer.

I'm from New Hampshire, and in the New England area, were is the nearest regional cemetery to New Hampshire?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. The regional cemetery designated to serve New Hampshire is in Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. It's a pretty long ways away, sir.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. And there's nothing in Vermont, nothing in Maine, nothing in New Hampshire?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. There is a State cemetery in Maine, but I believe eligibility is limited to residents of Maine. So there is nothing in Vermont or in New Hampshire to serve the residents of New Hampshire, sir.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. I have a large number of veterans who have brought to my attention some concerns they have about the fact that there is no cemetery for them. I was pretty sure that the one you mentioned was in Cape Cod. But we do get a lot of complaints. That's a long haul for a family and a big expense, as Mr. Parker knows, to have a funeral and to drive and have an interment at that long distance. So there is a great pressure now, if you will, on the congressional delegation in New Hampshire to have a veterans cemetery in New Hampshire.

Is there any possibility for that, any plan, any thought? I realize you have to deal with OMB and it's not meant as a criticism of you, but what is your reaction to that?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. I guess I will have to answer in two parts. First of all, I think, from a planning point of view, the realistic chances of a national cemetery in New Hampshire are fairly small, simply because the veteran population is so small. We did do a study for the Congress a couple of years ago which indicated the areas of the country most in need. The population centers we

would be trying to serve based on that study have a population ten times that high, if you will.

Recognizing that fact, there is a State cemetery grant program, and we have encouraged New Hampshire and, indeed, a number of other States, to apply for a grant. The VA is able to share 50–50 the cost of constructing a State veterans cemetery. Subsequently, under current law, we provide a $150 plot allowance to the State for every veteran who is buried in that State cemetery.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Could you provide me that information?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. I would be more than happy to. There has been some interest, on again, off again, up in New Hampshire on that. If you could do something to stimulate and focus that interest in the State, we would be more than pleased.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Just one more question and that's it, Mr. Chairman.

As you are probably aware, Pease Air Force Base is most likely going to be closed down, as early as Tuesday, unfortunately. One of the possible uses of a portion of it is for a cemetery, about 4,500 acres of it, so there is a significant amount of space there for a cemetery. That is obviously not something I can do at this time. It's up to the commission, as the base closure law works.

But should that recommendation come through, would you be supportive of that type of an endeavor?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. I'm not sure whether you're asking whether we would support a national cemetery on that property or a State cemetery.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. No, I think we want a national veterans cemetery.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Well, regardless of my personal opinion on that issue, I'm fairly certain I can tell you that the administration's position on it would not be supportive of a national cemetery there.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. How do we change their position?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Well, I think I would have to defer to the Members on that.

I would say my understanding of the base closing process would allow the State of New Hampshire to request land to be transferred to the State, for whatever purpose is desired, and if the State were to request land from the Secretary of Defense, or whoever makes those decisions, for use as a State cemetery, at that point we could certainly be in a positive and supportive mode and help you with the grant to develop that land into a cemetery.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Well, I won't belabor the point. I just want to get on the record that a VA national cemetery on Cape Cod is not exactly a good logistical location to serve all of New England's veterans. It's way out of the way. It's a long haul down there. It's very expensive. I think that another one in a more central location in New England is certainly warranted. There are a lot of veterans who live in those New England States. I just wanted to make the point on the record so that you understand where the veterans in my State are coming from, and I think it's true in other States as well as in New England.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. Certainly the point you make on logistics and distance is well made and accepted, and certainly we would not quarrel with you on the factual assessment of that.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. If there are no other questions, I have a few questions still remaining.

Mr. Costanzo, you mentioned that Arlington will be filled by the year 2020. When do you estimate the columbarium will be filled?

Mr. COSTANZO. Our current program provides for expanding the existing columbarium to 50,000 niches to accommodate 100,000 remains. We anticipate that this will be sufficient until the year 2040. There are also other areas within the cemetery where the terrain is too steep for ground burial but would be suitable for the construction of additional columbariums. So as we approach the year 2040, I am hopeful that those areas would be used for additional columbariums as needed.

Mr. STAGGERS. General Adams, you recently sent a letter to Mr. Montgomery on April 10, 1989, in support of H.R. 1414. I know that was part of your testimony.

Without objection, I would like to make a copy of that letter a part of the record.

[The letter appears at p. 59.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Is there substantial precedence to establishing the nonaccountable general officer position that you mentioned in your testimony? I understand that currently the general officer positions at the White House, State Department, CIA and Surgeon to Congress do not count against the total Defense general officers authorization. Is that your understanding, also?

General ADAMS. It is also my understanding, that certain general officer positions are not counted against the Armed Forces' authorizations. The position that is used by the American Battle Monuments Commission is charged to the Department of the Army. However, Mr. Montgomery's legislation, H.R. 733, or similar legislation, would eliminate the problem, because apparently the Department of Defense is not greatly concerned about the small numbers involved, but it is concerned about the grades. So if his legislation were passed, we think all concerned would benefit.

Mr. STAGGERS. Good.

One last question. What can we do to help you in Panama—I think you mentioned some things about Panama. Is there anything that the subcommittee can do to help you?

General ADAMS. I believe not. You read about it in the papers, and I hear about it from our superintendent who is stationed down there, that there is continual harassment by the police and the Panamanian Defense Forces. It's just plain and simply a matter of harassment. And it's not happening just to us. It's happening to all Americans down there.

Mr. STAGGERS. I thank the panel for its comments. Are there any other questions from other members? If not, we thank you for your testimony. As I stated before, there may be additional questions in writing that we would want you to respond to.

The second panel will be made up of mostly veterans groups, Richard Johnson, Richard Schultz, Richard Christian, Frank R. DeDeorge, and James Magill, if they would come forward.

Gentlemen, as has been stated earlier, your full prepared statement will be entered into the record, so feel free to summarize. Mr. Johnson.

STATEMENTS OF RICHARD W. JOHNSON, JR., DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION; RICHARD F. SCHULTZ, ASSOCIATE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS; RICHARD CHRISTIAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMITTEE, THE AMERICAN LEGION; FRANK R. DE GEORGE, ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA; AND JAMES N. MAGILL, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

STATEMENT OF RICHARD W. JOHNSON, JR.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, sir.

In the interest of expediting the hearing this morning, I will attempt to be very brief in my oral remarks.

As you have noted in your opening statement this morning, Mr. Chairman, and as the other committee members have noted, the regional cemetery policy that was developed by the Veterans' Administration, which is now supported by the Department of Veterans Affairs, was a wise alternative to the haphazard development that was going on in national cemeteries. However, the Non Commissioned Officers Association does not agree with the current Department of Veterans Affairs position that they do not wish to expand the cemetery system beyond that regional concept. We believe that many thousands of veterans, almost double the number of veterans currently served by regional cemeteries, could be served by the creation of smaller augmenting cemeteries in major population centers.

Congress took the first step towards making that happen two years ago when they provided the funding for environmental impact statements for cemeteries in Albany, Cleveland, Chicago, and in the Seattle/Tacoma area of Washington. Yet, the Department of Veterans Affairs has not taken the next logical step of requesting design funding and site acquisition funding for those facilities, nonetheless construction funding. We are extremely hopeful and very supportive that the committee go forth with the design funding and perhaps site acquisition funding for those sites within the next year.

In addition, the Non Commissioned Officers Association wants to state its strong and wholehearted support for H.R. 1414. Since 1923, the American Battle Monuments Commission has done yeomen's work in both creating and preserving American battle monuments overseas. We are quite hopeful that the enlisted members of the Armed Forces will soon be allowed to serve on that Commission.

We would also like at this point to take the opportunity to express our desire to see the expanded use of grave liners in national cemeteries for both esthetic and economic reasons.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I conclude my testimony.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Johnson, appears at p. 60.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Schultz.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD F. SCHULTZ

Mr. SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On behalf of the more than 1.2 million members of the Disabled American veterans, I wish to commend you for exercising the oversight responsibilities relative to the issue before us here today. This timely action clearly demonstrates your commitment to assuring that our Nation's veterans will have a final resting place available to them.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, at the present time approximately 70 percent of our Nation's veterans reside within 100 miles of a national cemetery. However, by the year 2020, more than one-half will reside more than 100 miles from an open national cemetery. The DAV believes that the current policy of the Veterans' Administration is too restrictive and would certainly recommend a more aggressive approach to solving the problems of accessible burial space.

In addressing this issue, our national convention delegates have adopted a position in support of having at least one open national cemetery in every State. We believe such a policy will provide a final resting place relatively close to the veteran's home and family.

Mr. Chairman, the DAV does applaud the efforts of the National Cemetery Service to provide our Nation's veterans and their families with timely, compassionate services. However, if they are to meet the increased demands placed upon them, sufficient FTEE must be made available. As you know, there has been an increase in the interments in national cemeteries of more than 35 percent since 1983, with a corresponding increase in FTE of only 4.1 percent. So clearly it has not kept pace with the increased work load.

In reference to the issue of grave liners, our national convention delegates have also adopted a position in support of providing cement grave liners in all national cemeteries. We believe this not only assists and is very helpful in the maintenance cost, but it also adds to the esthetic qualities in our national cemeteries. We are concerned, however, that since Public Law 100-322 does not require the use of grave liners for all new interments, it will have little effect on the overall use of them in national cemeteries. We therefore would suggest amending current law to require the use of grave liners in national cemeteries, were feasible.

In reference to Arlington National Cemetery, we would just like to say that we believe Arlington National Cemetery, under the stewardship of Mr. Costanzo, does an outstanding job of assisting families, the many individuals who visit the cemetery each year, and with the addition of the new Visitors Center that opened in

January of this year, that will enhance the services available to those who visit Arlington National Cemetery.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. Again, thank you for the opportunity to present our views here today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Schultz appears at p. 63.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

Mr. Christian.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD CHRISTIAN

Mr. CHRISTIAN. Mr. Chairman, The American Legion appreciates this opportunity to appear before the subcommittee to express its views concerning the oversight of the National Cemetery System, Arlington National Cemetery, and the American Battle Monuments Commission.

First, however, The American Legion would like to commend this subcommittee for its vital role in the formulation and passage of Public Law 100–322. This extensive piece of legislation responds to several concerns our organization has expressed over a number of years concerning the National Cemetery System's activities, programs and benefits.

Mr. Chairman, the use of grave liners better protects the casket and remains, reduces maintenance costs and efforts, and greatly improves the overall appearance of the cemetery, mainly by stabilizing the headstones and preventing the ground from sinking over a collapsing casket.

The demands of the National Cemetery System will significantly increase in the next three or four decades. The American Legion is convinced, however, that resources in the form of money and FTEE have not kept pace with the expanding work loads of this department. The FY 1990 budget proposal reflected a net increase of $3,1195,000. However, it now appears that current funding has proven inadequate to meet existing needs. Equipment needs and maintenance of existing equipment is lagging.

As of the 1987 report, prepared in response to Public Law 99–576, 65 cemeteries were receiving interments. By the year 2020, 36, or more than half, will be closed. The 10 key locations in which cemeteries are needed to meet future needs of the System have been identified. New cemeteries at these locations would also compensate for the closure of the previously noted 36 sites. These sites should be given immediate consideration.

Currently, national cemeteries are located within 100 miles of 70 percent of the veteran population. Officials of the National Cemetery System project simply maintaining the current system without allowing for demographic change will reduce that percentage to 40 percent by the year 2020.

The delegates to the 1988 national convention of The American Legion adopted Resolution No. 246, placing The Legion in support of further development and expansion of the National Cemetery System. That resolution further calls for The American Legion to support necessary funding for the construction of columbaria, whenever possible, and to sponsor and support legislation to restore the burial allowance for all honorably discharged veterans, and to

provide that the burial allowance shall not be an amount less than $400.

We have been asked to comment on H.R. 1414. This bill would amend current law to allow for the appointment of enlisted members to the American Battle Monuments Commission. The American Legion is supportive of this proposal which, in effect, recognizes the capabilities and dedication of the enlisted personnel in the Armed Forces.

Before we conclude, Mr. Chairman, we would like to note that The American Legion is very much aware of the sensitivity of the responsibilities of the national cemetery officials. According to their estimates, over 610,000 veterans will die by the year 2020. Based on these statistics alone, it is clearly evident that the system will encounter difficulty in maintaining the quality of service now provided.

We would like to conclude by stating that if new cemeteries are to be added to the system, it is important that sufficient resources are provided to operate them, and that the resources not be taken from existing cemeteries.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Christian appears at p. 67.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

Mr. DeGeorge.

STATEMENT OF FRANK R. DE GEORGE

Mr. DEGEORGE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear here today and speak on the agenda as presented.

PVA believes the rapidly aging veteran population dictates the need for expansion of the Department of Veterans Affairs cemetery system. We also want to express, regardless of the VA's position, our support for the location of a DVA cemetery in every State.

In our opinion, I would also point out that, as stated in the "independent budget" previously submitted for the full committee, that by the year 2000, 69 of the cemeteries existing in the system today will be closed to new grave sites. The need for a significant increase in available and accessible grave sites is obvious. Therefore, we do encourage efforts to expand the grants for State's veterans cemeteries. However, this effort alone will not adequately provide for the final needs of our Nation's veterans and a combined Federal-State effort is required.

I would also say we would advocate for looking at base closings, if that should become law, to utilize that space for cemetery purposes.

Finally, we are in full agreement with the American Battle Monuments Commission's effort to include enlisted personnel on the Commission.

We do want to thank the people who run the cemetery system, on behalf of the VA and the National Cemetery at Arlington, for they do a good job.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. DeGeorge appears at p. 72.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

Mr. Magill.

STATEMENT OF JAMES N. MAGILL

Mr. MAGILL. Thank you for the privilege of appearing before this subcommittee to present the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars with respect to the National Cemetery System.

As you know, Public Law 100–322 authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide grave liners for their use in national cemeteries. In a hearing before this subcommittee during the 100th Congress, the VFW voiced its support for the use of grave liners in the National Cemetery System. To date, the Department of Veterans Affairs cemeteries in four States are currently installing grave liners, and their cost effectiveness is being realized. It is our understanding that six additional national cemeteries will be utilizing grave liners this year. We support this action and would encourage all national and future national cemeteries to utilize the grave liner concept. We would also encourage Arlington National Cemetery to do the same.

H.R. 1414, introduced by you, would provide for the appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Forces to serve on the American Battle Monuments Commission. Inasmuch as the responsibility of the Commission is to honor all members of the Armed Forces, officers and enlisted ranks, we believe that it would be fitting that enlisted personnel be appointed to the Commission. Therefore, we do support H.R. 1414.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we were asked to comment on future expansion plans. We all know there is a great demand now and that demand will surely increase in the coming years for land to bury out Nation's veterans. We believe that the Department of Veterans Affairs should give more consideration to the construction of columbariums. We also believe that more cooperation between the States and the Department of Veterans Affairs should be encouraged in the establishment of State cemeteries. However, it should always be kept in mind that the burial of our Nation's veterans is a Federal responsibility rather than a State responsibility.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate VFW's long-standing resolution that we do support an open national cemetery in every State.

This concludes my statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Magill appears at p. 74.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

As was mentioned earlier, we may have additional questions after we get through our first round, so be prepared for written questions.

Mr. Magill, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Schultz did touch on the grave liners. What is the general feeling of the other two members of the panel about grave liners at national cemeteries?

Mr. DEGEORGE. We're supportive of that effort to include grave liners, sir.

Mr. CHRISTIAN. The American Legion supports the use of grave liners, sir.

Mr. STAGGERS. Let me ask a question for all of you.

Do you believe the burial criteria at Arlington should be changed to be consistent with those of our National Cemetery System, or should that be different as a memorial? However you want to proceed.

Mr. MAGILL. The Veterans of Foreign Wars would respond to that question. We have a very unique situation with Arlington. It is more of a shrine. You have people from all across the United States wanting to be buried there. Inasmuch as we would like to see all veterans who want to be buried there, we just don't see that that is reasonable because there isn't that much land. So, unfortunately, I think you do have to have restrictions that vary with the National Cemetery System.

Mr. SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, the DAV, while we have no convention mandate or official position on this issue, like some of the similar observations made by Mr. Magill, realizing they have space problems in Arlington. While we certainly would not wish to restrict any deserving veteran the right to be buried there, we do recognize the problems with the restricted space. Therefore, at this point I would not advocate any change in the current eligibility criteria for interment there.

Mr. DEGEORGE. The Paralyzed Veterans of America agrees. In fact, while we have no mandate also, I heard today that there was consideration for an additional cemetery in Washington, D.C. and that should be looked at very carefully as well.

Mr. JOHNSON. The Non Commissioned Officers Association has no position on the issue, either. But I don't think we would advocate any major change unless we could annex most of Fort Myer and convert that into cemetery property.

Mr. CHRISTIAN. Mr. Chairman, The American Legion has a resolution that supports all honorably discharged war veterans.

Mr. STAGGERS. One last question, and once again, I will ask it to the group as a whole.

If it is determined there is an excess of money in the State cemetery grant program, would you be in favor of using some of this to hire additional personnel to accommodate the increased work load, so that we can maintain the quality standards of our national cemeteries?

Mr. JOHNSON. The Non Commissioned Officers Association would support that.

Mr. CHRISTIAN. The American Legion supports that.

Mr. MAGILL. The Veterans of Foreign Wars would support that.

Mr. SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, the DAV would certainly support that.

Mr. DEGEORGE. The Paralyzed Veterans of America would support it as well.

Mr. STAGGERS. I sure asked the easy questions. We thank the panel for your time.

Our third panel is made up of some of the private interests, James Watkins and Jerry Brown. If they would come forward, we would be interested in your testimony. As has been stated earlier, under unanimous consent, your full statements will be made a part of the record, so you can summarize. There may be additional questions after you finish that we may want to submit in writing.

Mr. Watkins.

STATEMENTS OF JAMES E. WATKINS, JR., ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION, ACCOMPANIED BY STEPHEN L. MORGAN, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION; AND JERRY J. BROWN, CHAIRMAN, VETERANS CEMETERY COMMITTEE, NATIONAL CONCRETE BURIAL VAULT ASSOCIATION

STATEMENT OF JAMES E. WATKINS

Mr. WATKINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We appreciate the opportunity to be here and testify this morning. I have with me, on my right, Mr. Steve Morgan, who is the executive vice president of the American Cemetery Association.

The National Cemetery System provides an enduring form of recognition and memorialization for the veterans of the Armed Forces, especially for our combat veterans. As a cemeterian with 37 years of experience, I know that our industry takes justifiable pride in this National Cemetery System. We're proud to be in the same business with them.

However, as an industry and as taxpayers, we feel an obligation to bring to the attention of Congress certain problems inherent in the future development of the system. Frankly, we believe that if we don't point out these concerns, no one else will.

Instead of repeating our written testimony, I will summarize its four basic points, after which I will be glad to answer any questions that the committee might have.

First, the ACA is concerned with the escalating costs of operating the National Cemetery System. Since there are no detailed studies for determining how much money the system will cost to operate in future years, we urge Congress to initiate a thorough review of the system's cost structure prior to any expansion.

Second, VA demographics show a significant decline in the veterans' population in future years. We believe this development will result in numerous VA facilities serving fewer veterans after the year 2000. Since only about 15 percent of veterans choose burial in national cemeteries at this time, fewer VA interments will be made past the year 2000. There are currently 113 cemeteries in the system and four more are in the preplanning stages.

We believe that, unless the policy of expanding the system is changed, these cemeteries could eventually be regarded as monuments to wasted resources, instead of shrines for honoring our war dead.

Our third point is that the ACA urges that alternatives to building more national cemeteries should be explored. For example, we believe that a greater reliance on the burial and plot allowances will result in significant cost avoidance in future years. Obviously, these allowances can be used for burial in every veteran's home town, not 100 miles away or 50 miles away or whatever.

Finally, the ACA proposes that Congress, in conjunction with the President and the Department of Veterans Affairs, appoint a blue ribbon commission of Government and industry experts to make recommendations regarding the future of the National Cemetery System, including its cost structure. The ACA would be pleased to offer whatever it could of its resources to such a study.

Thank you for having us here. I will be glad to answer any questions the committee might have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Watkins appears at p. 76.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

Mr. Brown.

STATEMENT OF JERRY J. BROWN

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Staggers.

On behalf of Mr. Hardy and myself, who represent the National Concrete Burial Vault Association, we would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to give our testimony this morning.

The following is the National Concrete Burial Vault Association's position summary regarding the Government grave liner policy of the National Cemetery System.

First, we believe that the recently-adopted policy associated with Public Law 100-322, to require outer burial receptacles for interments within certain national cemeteries, was appropriate for the following reasons: (a) fiscal, (b) ongoing maintenance, (c) continued beautification of the national cemeteries, (d) safety—potential liability for pesonal injuries—(e) dignity—disinterments/relocation under Public Law 99-576—and finally, health considerations.

The decision, however, to revert back to the Government-furnished grave liner program, contracts let on bid, of the mid-1970s is, in our view, inappropriate for the following reasons:

The first reason is fiscal. We have seen where significant capital costs and budgetary constraints back in the mid-1970s prompted the Office of Management and Budget to cancel the Government grave liner program back in 1980.

We also feel that the Government-furnished grave liner program indicates a case of additional Government involvement in to the private enterprise system; that is to say, over 90 percent of the Nation's private/public and denominational cemeteries require some form of outer burial receptacles, where the traditional procurement of such receptacles has been the responsibility of next-of-kin vis-a-vis the funeral establishment and commercial burial vault manufacturer.

Albeit NCBVA believes in and heartily supports the institution of national cemeteries as a proud manifestation of our Nation's sensitivity and gratitude to the millions who have served and continue to serve our country, we believe a Government-sponsored grave liner program may escalate the perceived, if not real, discriminatory benefit system and inequality in the eyes of the Nation's veterans insofar as the National Cemetery System is concerned.

In view of the fact that approximately 450,000 veterans are dying annually, and of this number, an estimated 54,000 are being intered in national cemeteries, it is obvious that well over 80 percent of veterans burials are in the private sector cemeteries.

Now, for the sake of example, let's say that a highly decorated World War II veteran dies in his home town located somewhere in northern Wyoming. Because the two nearest national cemeteries could be hundreds of miles away, such as Fort Logan, CO and Black Hill National, this war veteran is buried in a local cemetery

and his next-of-kin receive a $150 burial benefit and a grave maker, which does not include the setting charge, as the sum total of the deceased veteran's burial benefits.

Conversely, let us hypothesize a situation where a veteran dies in Minneapolis, MN and is buried in Fort Snelling National Cemetery. Because he was fortunate enough to live and die within the purview of a national cemetery, this person was eligible for a grave space, grave spaces for eligible dependents, opening and closing of the graves, perpetual care of the graves, cemetery marker and, most recently, a Government grave liner in certain situations if a burial vault was not selected, all of these at no cost to the next-of-kin.

Therefore, in order to achieve a policy which might be equitable and beneficial to all concerned, especially the vast majority of veterans who do not have the opportunity to use a national cemetery, NCBVA suggests that the veterans burial allowance be increased, with outer receptacle amounts designated, which would cover the average retail cost of a minimum grave liner selected from the funeral home, or it could be used to apply to or defray the retail cost of any other type of burial vault or interment receptacle to be selected by the next-of-kin from the funeral establishment of choice.

Finally, NCBVA recommends that mandatory burial receptacles within the National Cemetery System be perpetuated but that the the procurement of burial vaults and/or grave liners be the responsibility of next-of-kin, selected from the funeral establishment, as is the procedure as I mentioned before in over 90 percent of the Nation's private and denominational cemeteries.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Brown appears at p. 82.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

Mr. Watkins, you mentioned about your Indiana roots, and it's a shame that Mr. Burton is not here to share some of the stories that I'm sure you two could share.

Do you think the VA should reestablish a burial reservation program?

Mr. WATKINS. We have no particular position on that, sir. Obviously, that is part of the study that we, like you, are still waiting for. The basis of our testimony is that we think the whole picture needs to be reviewed very carefully by the Congress, by the administration, by the VA, and that is only one part of it. So the answer to your question specifically is no, we have no position on it.

Mr. STAGGERS. You mentioned about how you want us to review the overall cost structure. Would you support a columbarium in a memorial concept whereby less land is utilized and veterans could use these as a meeting place and for ceremonial purposes?

Mr. WATKINS. I would generally support that. It is cost effective. It fits, as the testimony you heard from Mr. Costanzo this morning, and it certainly preserves the operation and the availability of space in many existing properties, so it would seem to make sense. But again, that's part of the overall study.

Mr. STAGGERS. On page 5 of your written testimony you mention "A policy of coordinating burial benefits consistent with the original objectives will reduce the number of interments in national cemeteries, resulting in a corresponding reduction in maintenance

expenses for future years." I think a lot of us would love to restore some of them, just like the nonservice plot allowance, but under budget realities, that will never happen.

You're not suggesting that we go that far, are you?

Mr. WATKINS. Not specifically, no, sir. Again, we think the whole picture needs to be explored. But we do submit that the cemetery business, whether it be private, religious or government, has one thing in common. We provide a product and then take care of it forever. In the private sector we do that by endowment funds. Forty-nine of the 50 States require that a portion of the sale price for burial rites be placed into future care endowment funds, which are irrevocable, and the income of which takes care of the cemetery in the future and keeps it from becoming a ward of the State.

I think that is the great difference between the private sector and the National Cemetery System, which makes a burial today and then will be back next year for money to take care of that, the year after that, the year after that, and forever. That is part of the cost of the system that I think, in my opinion, has not been addressed and should be addressed, because unless some miracle happens and funds become a lot more available than they seem to be at this point from the Federal Government, the problem is just going to get worse every year because there's going to be more requirement for maintenance. We heard today about the system, and certainly that makes sense—I know it does on my property. Every year it's going to get worse.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

Mr. Brown, the VA is currently furnishing grave liners in only a limited number of cemeteries. Do you think this policy should be expanded for more cemeteries, the grave liners?

Mr. BROWN. Mr. Staggers, I believe, speaking for the NCBVA and myself personally, that the requirement of some form of outer interment receptacle to maintain the cemeteries, for the reasons which I listed, is sound. In terms of a Government-furnished grave liner within the total National Cemetery System, I believe that the maintenance and the beautification of the National Cemetery System could be maintained and perpetuated if only a regulation was instituted and, as I indicated, to allow the selection of whatever outer burial receptacle, be it a grave liner, a burial vault, be the responsibility of the next-of-kin.

I see where this could be of great cost savings to the memorial affairs, the National Cemetery System, and, quite honestly, as I indicated, approximately 90 percent of the private sector cemeteries throughout the United States do require—it is a regulation, not a State or Federal regulation—but a cemetery ruling that some form of burial receptacle be used. I believe that a lot of money could be saved if the National Cemetery System did not get into the contracting of these Government grave liners.

Mr. STAGGERS. Aside from asking the veteran to bear more of a cost, why wouldn't it be more cost effective to contract out for grave liners on a bid-by-bid basis for the different cemeteries?

Mr. BROWN. If, in fact, the VA is going to enter a grave liner program to cover the entire 113 national cemeteries, obviously it would be more cost effective. I guess where we're coming from is why it is, given the fact that a relatively small percentage of veter-

ans are fortunate enough to live within the purview of a national cemetery, why would it not be better to make it a little more equitable by appropriating a burial receptacle amount that all the veterans could benefit by?

Mr. STAGGERS. If we're not going to ask the veteran to pay more of the cost, and we didn't do it by contracting out, is there any other way that you could share with us that we may be able to accomplish the grave liners?

Mr. BROWN. No. If you did not want the next-of-kin of the deceased to bear any additional cost by, as we're suggesting, just simply select the burial vault and/or grave liner from the funeral director to comply with cemetery regulation, if that is not in the realm of possibility, then obviously the contract would be the way to go.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a case of laryngitis so I apologize for my voice.

Mr. Watkins, are you aware of any practice in your industry whereby veterans have been buried in private cemeteries, the families receive the marker and then, because of the fact that the funeral had only been partially paid or was not totally paid off, the marker was not, in fact, placed on the grave by the undertaker?

Mr. WATKINS. I'm not aware of that, sir, because in a properly filled out application, the process calls for a certification by the cemetery that arrangements have been made to put the memorial in the cemetery. When one of our customers applies to the VA for it, we okay it. That's the last signature that goes on, ours, and we say everything is all right. So I would not expect that to happen.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. I can tell you that it does happen. It has happened more often that it should happen. In a particular case, which I won't specifically mention, but in a case in my own district, a veteran passed away. The marker came from the Government to the undertaker. The undertaker refused to place the marker on the grave, at a great cost and emotional stress to the wife of the veteran; he refused to put the marker on the grave, in spite of repeated calls by me asking him to do it personally, saying that he had not been paid for the funeral and, until he was paid, he would not place the marker on the grave. So the lady had to go to the grave site on several occasions to visit and not have the marker on the grave. He absolutely refused to put it on the grave until the funeral was paid. So a veterans group got together—I don't recall if it was the VFW or the Legion—but some group got together, raised some money, and paid off the undertaker. Then he placed the stone. At least that's the way it was related to me.

So I would just like to make a statement, that I find it absolutely outrageous, number one. And number two, that marker belongs to the family; it came from the Government, the taxpayers, to the veteran's family. If there is a cost to place it on the grave, then it ought to be added into the funeral. I'm sure they wouldn't leave the body lying there until after the funeral expenses were paid, and, by the same token, they ought to be put the marker on the grave.

I would say, if you're aware of those kinds of practices in the industry, I think they ought to be stopped. If it isn't, then I intend to introduce legislation to see that it is stopped, because it's outrageous.

Mr. WATKINS. I would agree with you, sir. I would point out one thing. The situation as you relayed it refers to the undertaker having done it. We are not funeral directors or undertakers.

I would assume, if the marker had been properly applied for, the cemetery authority had and approved it and indicated arrangements there. But as you related, some third party, who really doesn't belong in this equation at all, was in the process for one reason or another and was the party that held it up.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. No, this was the undertaker himself.

Mr. WATKINS. That's what I'm saying. We are not undertakers. We have no association with—In the process, we are one part of the industry, and the undertaker and funeral director is another part of the industry.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. He might be a third party, but he's a very important third party.

Mr. WATKINS. Very much so.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. He's the guy who buries the body.

Mr. WATKINS. There is nothing in the VA marker application that requires the participation of the funeral director in any way.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. In your opinion, whose marker is it? Is it the undertaker's marker?

Mr. WATKINS. No, sir.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Or is it the family's?

Mr. WATKINS. It's neither. It's my understanding that that memorial remains the property of the United States Government. That's been made very plain to us. Because when a memorial is removed for one reason or other, replaced by the family, then before it can be destroyed, it's the property of the United States Government. That's my understanding, sir.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. So if it's the property of the United States Government, then the Government ought to be able to dictate what's done with it, and when it's done.

Mr. WATKINS. Yes. And had the proper procedures been followed, the cemetery authority, not somebody outside. The cemetery authority itself would have endorsed that application and indicated that arrangements had been——

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. So, in fact, if this practice occurs, then you would go on record as being opposed to it?

Mr. WATKINS. Yes.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. You feel that even if the funeral director is not paid at the time of the funeral, at the time the marker is received—I don't want to put words in your mouth; just tell me if I'm correct—the marker ought to be placed on the grave and added to the bill, if there is a charge for putting it there.

Mr. WATKINS. Yes.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE [continuing]. And put there even if payment has not been completely made?

Mr. WATKINS. Yes, sir, absolutely.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Thank you.

Mr. WATKINS. In our case, the great preponderance, very rarely do we have a marker brought to us by somebody else. The marker is sent directly to us as consignee. A funeral director is almost never in the process at all. The marker would have been sent to us as the cemetery. Why have somebody else handle it? A granite marker or metal marker is rather heavy and it can be delivered directly to the cemetery. I don't think we would have one a year that was——

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. I don't know what happens in other cases, and in this particular case, I don't know if it was delivered directly to the cemetery or to the undertaker. But in any case, the undertaker was in the equation and he was the one who refused to allow the marker to be placed on the grave.

Mr. STAGGERS. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Yes.

Mr. STAGGERS. I would suggest maybe Mr. Hamerschlag return to the table and answer the question on whether he has received any complaints, if the gentleman would allow me to do that.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Yes, I would be happy to do that, Mr. Chairman.

I might just say, while he's coming to the table, a comment that was made to me by staff. I think as far as the widow is concerned, whether it's the undertaker or the cemetery, it's one and the same thing as far as she's concerned. It might be different as far as you're concerned. If the grave stone is not placed there, then certainly she could care less whether it's the cemetery or the undertaker who doesn't place it there. The point is, it's not there.

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. I would say that certainly the VA would agree with everything you've said. We became aware of that specific case, and when we did become aware, we got in touch with the widow and offered to send a second marker directly to the cemetery. The cemetery had agreed to set it. We were making those preparations when, as you say, some veterans groups went ahead and paid for the funeral and the funeral director then agreed to release that particular marker. So our intervention at that point was really overcome by events.

But I would say that we do take the posture that, one, those markers remain Government property, and two, it is our desire to see that they are set in every case. We will certainly use every tool at our disposal, be that moral persuasion or with second markers or what have you, working with veterans service organizations, to make sure that every grave is properly marked.

We were just as appalled as you were about that particular case.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. I just want to point out for the record that in the case of this individual, payment was made on a month-to-month basis. It wasn't that somebody just said, "You buried my husband and now tough luck." Payment was being made. There was a downpayment, there was a monthly payment being made, not much, but there was an attempt to pay. It was a tough situation. And there's no quarrel with the VA. The VA did react wonderfully in that case and we appreciate it. You were very helpful.

I just wondered whether you had run into this before? Perhaps it should have been asked of you, rather than Mr. Watkins. But how prevalent is this? Has it happened before, or is this just an isolated incident?

Mr. HAMERSCHLAG. I would say it's an isolated incident. I certainly wouldn't say it's unique, but it's not a common occurrence at all. It's very unusual.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Parker.

Mr. PARKER. Let me say a few words on that, because I believe it's an isolated incident, also. If my colleague from New Hampshire would answer a question for me, did you contact the State funeral directors association, their ethics committee, that sets standards and controls the funeral directors in your State?

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. I did not do that.

Mr. PARKER. That should have been done, and I'll tell you why——

Mr. SMITH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. I didn't know that it was my responsibility to do it.

Mr. PARKER. No, no. I'm saying someone should have, because you can actually jerk a knot in their neck pretty quickly, because that is something that funeral directors, as a whole, do not do. As far as a funeral director doing that, I really have problems with somebody even approaching it from that standpoint. An ethical funeral director would not do that. It's a situation where the State funeral directors association would be able to address that problem pretty rapidly. I've never heard of that case coming up, and I've been a funeral director for 20 years. That's an odd situation. But I would still contact the State and let them know what happened, and have the family to file a complaint. I think that can be addressed.

Mr. Watkins, you mentioned basically a trust fund. You talked about an endowment, but basically it was a trust fund for cemeteries. I agree, that I think there has been a basic problem as far as providing for the future maintenance of cemeteries and the upkeep of cemeteries, because of not having a trust fund.

Now, you mentioned 49 out of 50 States have such an endowment program. What is the percentage in the cost of the moneys that they receive that they put into trust, the cemetery?

Mr. WATKINS. It varies widely, Mr. Parker. Most of them start at 10 percent. My own State of Indiana requires 15 percent. In my own cemetery we put in 25 percent.

Mr. PARKER. But a minimum of 15 percent in Indiana?

Mr. WATKINS. Yes, that is required, 15 percent on land sales.

Mr. PARKER. I think that is something that needs to be addressed. For instance, one of the ways to offset the cost the cemetery has is—I'm talking about a private cemetery, the grave openings and so forth that come along. The way the situation is now, if we were able to put some money aside, as far as each burial, have it grow, have an endowment out there, it would be very helpful and we would solve some of the problems that are going to occur on down the line.

You know, we've had problems with cemeteries in this country on a national level for a long time, because the Congressional Cemetery here in Washington got in such a state of disrepair. We had eight cenotaphs of different Presidents that were there; John Philip Sousa is buried there. It got to the point where people were afraid to go into the cemetery because they were going to be attacked by wild dogs and everything else. It was really a bad situation. So I think that is something that needs to be addressed, and it should have been addressed a long time ago.

Mr. WATKINS. We applaud your position, sir. That is exactly the song that we've been singing for many years. Currently, there is a tremendous unfunded future liability in the National Cemetery System, and your suggestion is right on target as far as we're concerned. It belongs as part of the study that we asked for. We're concerned about a cemetery and the demographics that might be created now, and then, by 2020 or so, because of the declining veterans' population, not be needed. But it still has to be maintained. It's axiomatic when you open a cemetery. You make that first burial, and somebody is in the cemetery business at that address forever. Whether all the spaces are used or not, they are going to have to be maintained. So the maintenance is taken on whether or not there's a veteran buried in that grave. So this is exactly what we're trying to raise.

Mr. PARKER. For the record, I think it would be good for the committee to understand that, nationally, you have city cemeteries which start as cemeteries, they're completely full now, no more grave spaces are sold, they are in the same situation. When they started them, it just wasn't that big a thing. You were going to go and dig a grave, bury a body. Now the upkeep is so horrendous, they never established trust funds and they're having a horrible time throughout this country. It is all because people didn't think far enough into the future to know it was coming.

Do you agree that grave liners save money, as far as maintenance?

Mr. WATKINS. Absolutely, sir. I cannot conceive of an experienced individual being in the cemetery business today and not requiring some kind of permanent outer receptacle.

Mr. PARKER. I agree.

Now, Mr. Brown, do you agree that grave liners save money on maintenance?

Mr. BROWN. Absolutely.

Mr. PARKER. Okay. We all agree on that point.

Now, you make the statement that someone has the misfortune of dying hundreds of miles from a national cemetery and, therefore, your argument is they should not be penalized because they died away from a national cemetery and should be provided a grave liner when they die, or at least provided moneys to buy a grave liner or a vault, right?

Mr. BROWN. That's correct.

Mr. PARKER. Okay. Now, I'm going to disagree with you here, because, you see, you are approaching this from the standpoint that it is a benefit to the veteran. The grave liner is not a benefit to the veteran. Because of the maintenance of the grave, it costing less money to maintain that grave, it is not a benefit to the veteran; it's

a benefit to the cemetery. That is the reason that we can turn around and talk about grave liners in a national cemetery as opposed to a grave liner for every veteran. It has nothing to do with the veteran. It has to do with the grave. That is where your logic doesn't follow.

Now, if it was a benefit to the veteran, I would agree that we would need to have a fund out there. But we are not providing this to everybody. It is for our benefit; it's for the benefit of the Government, for the benefit of the grave.

Therefore, when we're dealing with the grave liner, if we expand the program to cover all national cemeteries, then we wind up in a situation where we have got to provide it for our benefit, for the upkeep of the grave, in the least expensive manner possible. That would come from bidding, that would come from the lowest price we could get, and since it's not as benefit to the veteran, they really don't have anything as far as input into the equation at all.

Now, what's your response to that?

Mr. BROWN. Well, I guess my response to that is I concur with your statement that if, in fact, the National Cemetery System decides that all interments within the system must be made with some form of outer burial receptacle—and incidentally, just for your information, our company happens to have the Government grave liner contract in Minneapolis. This might not make sense, the posture that I'm espousing now.

Mr. PARKER. You also have it in Houston, right?

Mr. BROWN. No. We are the licensee in a three-State area of Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota.

Mr. PARKER. Okay.

Mr. BROWN. But, getting back to the requirement, I guess our position—Incidentally, we came to the Memorial Affairs people in 1984 with all kinds of information relative to why it would behoove the National Cemetery System to require outer burial receptacles, factoring in approximate labor costs, which is not really pertinent now, except to say that we have been endorsing this, that the National Cemetery System would benefit by requiring some form of outer burial receptacle.

I guess our position is why—and I'll be very frank; I may get run out of the room—but why if, in fact, they are going to require grave liners, why can't the National Cemetery System then do as again 90 percent of the private sector cemeteries do, by saying we have a requirement and then leave the procurement of that unit up to the next-of-kin. Why is it necessary to provide, as I said, in 1980, for reasons which we understand were fiscal reasons, the OMB canceled the Government grave liner program that had existed since 1975. It would just seem to me that that would be the more appropriate way to go. You must have some form of burial receptacle and that's it.

Mr. PARKER. But the family still has the choice if they want to go and buy a vault.

Mr. BROWN. Oh, absolutely.

Mr. PARKER. They can buy a vault. They don't have to have the liner.

Mr. BROWN. Absolutely.

Mr. PARKER. But if they don't buy a vault, if they choose to buy the casket without any type of rigid outside container, then, in order to save money—and it has been proven that it does save money, in the process of conducting the studies and all—they're going to find out it does save money because every cemetery knows it saves money. Wilbert vault knows it saves money. That's one of the ways you merchandise your equipment, your vault, your product. It is just a simple matter that it is for the cemetery itself, it's not for the veteran. The family still has a choice. If they want to buy a vault, they can do that.

Now, understand, I've been in business a long time. I've been a funeral director for a long time. This policy of the national cemeteries providing a grave liner can tend to hurt vault sales as far as that local funeral home. It takes money out of their pocket.

Mr. BROWN. That's correct.

Mr. PARKER. You go on up the line, it takes money out of the producer of the vault's pocket, which you're representing the producer of that vault. So it becomes a monetary thing.

But I think what we're looking at, and if I were representing a vault company, or if I were representing a funeral home, and I was sitting at that table, I would be talking about free enterprise and I would be saying the family should not be required to do this, that, or the other. I'm not sitting there. I'm sitting here representing the veterans, the people that use the VA system. I'm representing the people who have to keep those cemeteries up, trying to manage the cemeteries the best way they possibly can. You do that by not necessarily agreeing from the vault business standpoint. There are two different business standpoints here. I'm on the other side and I think it makes more sense from the way I'm looking at it. But I can understand your argument.

Mr. BROWN. May I just refer back for a moment to what you said regarding the person who dies in Wyoming. There is, let's say, in the village cemetery in that particular town the requirement that they must have at least a minimum outer interment receptacle. That next-of-kin, in order to be buried in that cemetery—and as you well know, there are many cemeteries that will not allow interment without some form of burial enclosure. Then the next-of-kin, in that situation, must select, presumably from the funeral home, a grave box, if not a burial vault, in order to be able to be buried.

So I guess I can't quite see maybe the logic of what you said relative to my reference to someone who is able to be buried in a national cemetery, where there is a requirement that there be some form of outer burial receptacle, and that person says, "Well, gee, if I can get a Government grave liner without having to pay the funeral director or the vault company, that's the route I'll go." So then the grave liner is furnished and the next-of-kin does not have to pay for it, as opposed to the person in Wyoming who does, because it's a cemetery regulation.

I guess that was my point. I mean to argue, but——

Mr. PARKER. But the family is free to choose. The family will be able to go to that cemetery, they can pick whatever private cemetery they want. If they come to the national cemetery, there are certain regulations that are going to be prescribed, and that's what

we're talking about. There is one regulation that is prescribed simply because it saves, as far as maintenance of the grave and of the ground.

Because of that, it is a situation where in the private sector that family, if they select a cemetery which requires a rigid outside container or a vault or whatever, they have entered into a contractual agreement with that private company, whatever it is. That was their decision to make.

If they want to get the benefits that they're going to be able to get with a national cemetery, then they're either going to have to travel the distance or whatever to do it. I disagree that people are going to make the decision for burial in a national cemetery based on a grave liner. That is not the reason they're going to make that decision.

Mr. BROWN. Oh, I totally concur with that.

Mr. PARKER. Anyway, I think it's a simple matter. I think I've made the points I wanted to make, because I think I'm looking at it the right way. I haven't been convinced that I'm not looking at it the right way. But I do appreciate everything that has been said.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Mr. STAGGERS. Is there any further questions? We thank the panel for your participation, and all the other panels. As I have stated earlier to each panel, there may be additional questions in writing that we may submit.

This hearing is now closed.

[Whereupon, at 11:40 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

TESTIMONY OF ARTHUR S. HAMERSCHLAG
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
APRIL 13, 1989

GOOD MORNING, MR. CHAIRMAN. I AM PLEASED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH AN UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. AS REQUESTED IN YOUR LETTER OF INVITATION, I WILL COMMENT ON WORKLOADS, FUTURE EXPANSION PLANS, AND INSTALLATION OF GRAVELINERS IN VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES. THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS DEFERS TO THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION WITH REGARD TO H.R. 1414, A BILL REGARDING APPOINTMENT OF ENLISTED MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES TO THE ABMC.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

1989 MARKS AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE FOR ALL VETERANS' PROGRAMS, WITH THE ELEVATION OF VA TO CABINET STATUS ON MARCH 15, 1989. PUBLIC LAW 100-527 DESIGNATES OUR ORGANIZATION AS THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. THIS TERM HAS BEEN USED IN TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE, SINCE 1973, AND REFLECTS OUR IDENTITY AND MISSION IN A VERY POSITIVE WAY.

IN HIS REMARKS AT THE WHITE HOUSE CEREMONY RECOGNIZING THE ELEVATION OF VA TO CABINET STATUS, PRESIDENT BUSH PAID SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. "THERE IS NO POWER OR GLAMOUR IN SUCH A JOB," HE SAID, "BUT THERE IS CARING AND RESPECT -- FOR THOSE WHO ARE GONE, AND FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE. IN THESE 'GARDENS OF STONE' SLEEP THE HEROES -- MEN AND WOMEN -- OF EVERY SERVICE, MARINE, SOLDIER, SAILOR, AIRMAN; LOST YOUTH THAT CAN ONLY BE MEASURED IN CENTURIES."

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM ORIGINATED DURING THE CIVIL WAR, WHEN PRESIDENT LINCOLN AND THE CONGRESS PROVIDED THAT PERMANENT BURIAL GROUNDS WOULD BE SET ASIDE FOR SOLDIERS WHO DIED IN SERVICE TO THEIR COUNTRY. IN 1973, PUBLIC LAW 93-43 FORMALLY ESTABLISHED THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

AS PART OF THE VA. JURISDICTION OVER 82 CEMETERIES WAS TRANSFERRED FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY TO VA. THESE WERE COMBINED WITH 21 CEMETERIES PREVIOUSLY OPERATED BY VA MEDICAL FACILITIES, TO FORM THE BASIS OF THE SYSTEM AS WE KNOW IT TODAY.

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM HAS A THREE-FOLD MISSION ESTABLISHED IN LAW:

O OPERATION OF 113 NATIONAL CEMETERIES LOCATED THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND PUERTO RICO. PRESENT AND FORMER MEMBERS OF THE ARMED SERVICES; THEIR SPOUSES, WIDOWS, OR WIDOWERS; AND CERTAIN DEPENDENT CHILDREN ARE ELIGIBLE FOR BURIAL.

O PROVIDING GOVERNMENT MARKERS UPON REQUEST FOR THE GRAVES OF VETERANS IN PRIVATE CEMETERIES, AND FOR ALL GRAVES IN NATIONAL AND STATE VETERANS CEMETERIES. MEMORIAL MARKERS MAY BE PROVIDED FOR VETERANS WHOSE REMAINS WERE NEVER RECOVERED, LOST AT SEA, OR OTHERWISE NOT AVAILABLE FOR BURIAL.

O ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE CEMETERY GRANTS PROGRAM. MATCHING GRANTS ARE PROVIDED TO STATES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT, EXPANSION OR IMPOVEMENT OF STATE OWNED AND OPERATED VETERANS CEMETERIES.

EFFECTIVE IN FY 1990, THE NCS WILL ALSO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL MEMORIAL CERTIFICATE PROGRAM. UNDER THIS PROGRAM, THE NEXT OF KIN OF ANY HONORABLY DISCHARGED VETERAN MAY RECEIVE A PRESIDENTIAL CERTIFICATE EXPRESSING THE NATION'S APPRECIATION FOR HIS OR HER MILITARY SERVICE.

THE GOAL OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IS TO CONDUCT VETERANS' MEMORIAL PROGRAMS WITH DIGNITY, EFFECTIVENESS AND COMPASSION, AND TO ASSURE THAT THE NATIONAL CEMETERIES ARE MAINTAINED AS FITTING SHRINES TO ALL VETERANS WHO HAVE SERVED THEIR COUNTRY. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THIS IMPORTANT PART OF OUR NATION'S HERITAGE IS ENCOURAGED.

NATIONAL CEMETERIES

TODAY THERE ARE 113 CEMETERIES IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. OF THESE, 68 ARE OPEN TO NEW INTERMENTS, AND 45 ARE CLOSED. DURING THE PAST FISCAL YEAR, THERE WERE A RECORD 56,216 INTERMENTS IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. THE NUMBER OF INTERMENTS HAS BEEN RISING STEADILY, AND IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE INCREASING AS THE VETERAN POPULATION AGES.

THIS WEEKEND, ON APRIL 15, VA WILL HAVE A SPECIAL CEREMONY RECOGNIZING THE TRANSFER OF THE ARIZONA MEMORIAL VETERANS CEMETERY TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. THE TRANSFER WAS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1. THE CEMETERY HAS BEEN RE-NAMED THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL CEMETERY OF ARIZONA, AND IS THE 113TH CEMETERY IN THE SYSTEM. IT IS BEING INCORPORATED INTO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 346 OF PUBLIC LAW 100-322. THIS CEMETERY WILL SERVE THE RAPIDLY GROWING VETERAN COMMUNITY IN PHOENIX AND THROUGHOUT THE SOUTHWEST.

ANOTHER CEMETERY IS UNDER DEVELOPMENT TO SERVE THE LARGE VETERAN POPULATION OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA. THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY NATIONAL CEMETERY, LOCATED ON 324 ACRES OF DONATED LAND IN MERCED COUNTY, WILL BE OPEN FOR BURIALS IN MID-1991. THIS WILL BE THE 114TH CEMETERY IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CEMETERY IS ON A "FAST TRACK" SCHEDULE. THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) AND MASTER PLAN HAVE BEEN COMPLETED, AND THE PROJECT IS NOW IN WORKING DRAWINGS. $11.5 MILLION HAS BEEN APPROPRIATED FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THIS CEMETERY.

BASED ON CURRENT BURIAL PROJECTIONS, THE ZACHARY TAYLOR AND LITTLE ROCK NATIONAL CEMETERIES ARE EXPECTED TO CLOSE BY THE END OF THIS FISCAL YEAR. WHENEVER A NATIONAL CEMETERY IS EXPECTED TO RUN OUT OF GRAVE SPACE, WE CONDUCT A THOROUGH REVIEW TO DETERMINE IF THERE ARE ANY ADDITIONAL BURIAL SITES THAT CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE, AND IF THERE ARE ANY VIABLE OPTIONS FOR KEEPING THE CEMETERY OPEN LONGER THAN ANTICIPATED. AT LITTLE ROCK, LOCAL VETERANS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS HAVE ARRANGED A POSSIBLE DONATION OF ADJACENT LAND. ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES ARE BEING CONDUCTED ON THE PROPERTY TO ASSURE THAT IT WILL BE SUITABLE FOR USE BY THE NATIONAL CEMETERY.

ADDITIONAL LAND HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED TO THE ROCK ISLAND AND FT. SAM HOUSTON NATIONAL CEMETERIES FROM LOCAL MILITARY BASES AS DIRECTED BY PUBLIC LAW 100-180. EFFORTS ARE ALSO UNDERWAY TO OBTAIN ADJACENT LAND FOR EXPANSION OF THE SANTA FE, FT. BAYARD, AND WILLAMETTE NATIONAL CEMETERIES. EXPANSION OF EXISTING NATIONAL CEMETERIES THROUGH ACQUISITION OF ADJACENT LAND HAS BEEN A VERY SUCCESSFUL AND COST EFFECTIVE MEANS OF MAINTAINING SERVICE TO VETERANS.

AS DIRECTED IN THE FY 1988 CONTINUING RESOLUTION, VA IS CONDUCTING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS (EIS) AT FOUR LOCATIONS IDENTIFIED AS PRIORITY AREAS FOR NEW NATIONAL CEMETERIES. THESE ARE CHICAGO, CLEVELAND, SEATTLE/TACOMA, AND ALBANY. A NUMBER OF POSSIBLE SITES WERE PROPOSED IN EACH AREA, THROUGH PUBLIC ADVERTISEMENTS AND COMMUNITY INTEREST. THESE HAVE BEEN REVIEWED TO IDENTIFY THE PROPERTIES WHICH MEET BASIC CRITERIA IN TERMS OF ACREAGE AND AVAILABILITY. CONSULTANTS ARE BEING HIRED TO IDENTIFY THE MOST PROMISING SITES TO BE INCLUDED IN THE EIS'S, AND TO CONDUCT THE FORMAL STUDIES. DRAFT REPORTS ARE EXPECTED IN ABOUT 10 TO 12 MONTHS. RESOURCES FOR DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF CEMETERIES AT THOSE LOCATIONS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRESIDENT'S FY 1990 BUDGET REQUEST.

PROJECTED BASE CLOSINGS AT TWO LOCATIONS HAVE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. SAN FRANCISCO NATIONAL CEMETERY, LOCATED AT THE PRESIDIO, IS IN A CLOSED STATUS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT WHEN THE PRESIDIO CLOSES, MOST OF THE LAND WILL BE TURNED OVER TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE ARMY, AND ARE ADVISING THE PARK SERVICE OF OUR POSSIBLE INTEREST IN EXPANDING THE CEMETERY.

FT. SHERIDAN IN CHICAGO IS ALSO IDENTIFIED AS A CLOSING MILITARY BASE. THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION RECOMMENDED THAT THE SMALL POST CEMETERY BE TRANSFERRED TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. VA IS WORKING WITH THE ARMY TO IMPLEMENT THIS RECOMMENDATION, AND TO SEE IF ADDITIONAL LAND MIGHT BE AVAILABLE. SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS HAVE PROPOSED THIS AS A SITE FOR A NEW NATIONAL CEMETERY TO SERVE THE LONG TERM NEEDS OF CHICAGO VETERANS. ACCORDINGLY, FT. SHERIDAN IS ONE OF THE SITES UNDER CONSIDERATION IN THE PRELIMINARY EIS PROCESS, AND WOULD SEEM TO HAVE EXCELLENT POTENTIAL AS A CEMETERY SITE.

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM CREDO CALLS UPON US TO "PRESERVE AND PERFECT" THE SACRED GROUNDS OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERIES. CONGRESS IN PL 100-322 AUTHORIZED THE USE OF GRAVELINERS IN NATIONAL CEMETERIES AS A MEANS OF MAINTAINING NATIONAL CEMETERY GROUNDS TO A HIGH STANDARD. IN IMPLEMENTING THIS PROVISION, THE NCS CONTRACTED WITH A PRIVATE FIRM TO STUDY THE COST EFFECTIVENESS OF GRAVELINERS IN NATIONAL CEMETERIES. BASED ON THOSE

FINDINGS, GRAVELINERS HAVE BEEN APPROVED FOR NINE NATIONAL CEMETERIES -- CALVERTON, RIVERSIDE, MASSACHUSETTS, AND FLORIDA, WHICH HAD USED THEM PREVIOUSLY, AND NOW HOUSTON, FT. SAM HOUSTON, FT. SNELLING, FT. LOGAN AND WILLAMETTE. THE PROGRAM WILL BE EXPANDED TO OTHER LOCATIONS TO THE EXTENT PRACTICABLE. THE CONTRACTOR'S STUDY FOCUSED STRICTLY ON COST SAVINGS THAT CAN BE REALIZED IN GROUNDS MAINTENANCE. IT NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT GRAVELINERS ALSO IMPROVE THE APPEARANCE OF CEMETERY GROUNDS. THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION FOR PRESERVING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND MEETING THE EXPECTATIONS OF VETERANS AND NEXT OF KIN.

LAST SUMMER'S SEVERE DROUGHT KILLED GRASS AND PLANTINGS, WEAKENED TREES, AND AGGRAVATED OTHER PROBLEMS SUCH AS WEED CONTROL. MANY CEMETERIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WERE AFFECTED. IT MAY TAKE SEVERAL SEASONS TO RECOVER, ASSUMING THERE IS NOT ANOTHER DROUGHT IN THE MEANTIME. IMPROVING CONDITIONS AT THOSE LOCATIONS IS ONE OF OUR PRIORITIES, TO THE EXTENT THAT CURRENT OPERATING RESOURCES PERMIT. THIS MAY INVOLVE EXTENSIVE TREE REPLACEMENT, RESEEDING, RESODDING, WEED CONTROL, AND IRRIGATION ENHANCEMENTS.

ALL OF THE VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES ARE ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, AND MANY CONTAIN HISTORIC STRUCTURES AND AMENITIES. COLLECTIVELY, THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM REPRESENTS AN IRREPLACEABLE LINK TO OUR NATION'S PAST. IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THIS SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL RESOURCE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS, THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM HAS ENTERED INTO A PROGRAMMATIC AGREEMENT WITH THE PRESIDENT'S ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICERS. UNDER THIS AGREEMENT, VA IS DEVELOPING A CULTURAL

RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN WHICH WILL PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW, INVENTORY, AND TREATMENT PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. THE ACTUAL STUDY WILL BE CONDUCTED BY A PRIVATE CONSULTANT. THE CONTRACT IS SCHEDULED TO BE AWARDED THIS FISCAL YEAR. AN ADVISORY PANEL, COMPOSED OF SPECIALISTS IN THE PRESERVATION FIELD, IS ASSISTING VA IN THIS PROJECT.

THIS HISTORIC MISSION OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERIES CONTINUES TODAY. FOR EXAMPLE, ON MEMORIAL DAY THE REMAINS OF 19 CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS WILL BE RE-BURIED IN THE BEAUFORT NATIONAL CEMETERY. THE SOLDIERS ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN MEMBERS OF THE 55TH MASSACHUSETTS MILITIA, A REGIMENT OF FREE BLACKS AND FORMER SLAVES WHO HAD COME FROM VARIOUS STATES. THE REMAINS WERE RECOVERED FROM A CONSTRUCTION SITE NEAR CHARLESTON, S.C. THE FOLLOWING WEEK, VA WILL DEDICATE A MEMORIAL MARKER TO THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR PATRIOT NATHAN HALE AT THE CALVERTON NATIONAL CEMETERY ON LONG ISLAND. HALE'S FINAL MISSION TO GATHER MILITARY INTELLIGENCE FOR GENERAL WASHINGTON TOOK HIM TO LONG ISLAND, WHERE HE IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN CAPTURED. HALE WAS EXECUTED IN NEW YORK CITY, AND HIS REMAINS WERE NEVER RECOVERED.

ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IS DESIGN EXCELLENCE. THIS YEAR VA RECEIVED A FEDERAL DESIGN ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR THE FT. CUSTER NATIONAL CEMETERY NEAR BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN. THE AWARD, GIVEN AS PART OF THE PRESIDENTIAL AWARDS FOR DESIGN EXCELLENCE PROGRAM, WAS ANNOUNCED AT A WHITE HOUSE CEREMONY. THE FT. CUSTER PROJECT WAS ONE OF ONLY 68 TO RECEIVE THE AWARD, FROM MORE THAN 500 SUBMISSIONS. THE CITATION COMMENDED THE PRESERVATION OF NATURAL FEATURES IN THE LANDSCAPE, WHICH "BECOME SETTINGS FOR REFLECTION AND MEDITATION."

HEADSTONES AND MARKERS

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM PROVIDED A RECORD 293,039 GRAVE MARKERS IN FY 1988. THIS REPRESENTS A 27 PERCENT INCREASE OVER THE YEARLY AVERAGE FROM 1973 THROUGH 1987. MARKERS MAY BE ISSUED UPON REQUEST FOR VETERANS' GRAVES IN PRIVATE CEMETERIES, AND FOR ALL GRAVES IN NATIONAL AND STATE VETERANS CEMETERIES. THEY ARE DELIVERED TO DESTINATIONS WORLD WIDE.

TIMELINESS HAS IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY IN THIS PROGRAM, DUE IN LARGE PART TO A SUCCESSFUL AUTOMATION INITIATIVE. THE AVERAGE TIME REQUIRED TO PROCESS A CLAIM, FROM DATE OF RECEIPT TO THE POINT AT WHICH AN ORDER IS RELEASED TO THE MANUFACTURER, WAS REDUCED FROM 53 DAYS IN OCTOBER 1987 TO 19.4 DAYS BY THE END OF FY 1988.

FUTURE EFFORTS IN THIS PROGRAM WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON IMPROVEMENTS IN QUALITY, TIMELINESS AND MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY.

STATE CEMETERY GRANTS

THE STATE CEMETERY GRANTS PROGRAM WAS ENACTED IN 1978 FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASSISTING STATES TO PROVIDE GRAVESITES IN AREAS WHERE NATIONAL CEMETERIES CANNOT FULLY SATISFY THE BURIAL NEEDS OF VETERANS. VA MAY PROVIDE UP TO 50 PERCENT MATCHING GRANTS TO STATES FOR ESTABLISHING, EXPANDING OR IMPROVING THEIR OWN VETERANS CEMETERIES. THE PROGRAM IS AUTHORIZED ON A FIVE YEAR BASIS, AND WAS RECENTLY EXTENDED THROUGH FY 1994 BY PL 100-687.

SINCE ENACTMENT OF THE PROGRAM, 18 STATES AND ONE TERRITORY HAVE APPLIED FOR FEDERAL FUNDING. AS OF THE END OF FY 1988, $19.5 MILLION HAS BEEN

OBLIGATED TO SUPPORT 28 CEMETERIES. UPON COMPLETION OF PENDING PROJECTS, ALL STATES BUT SIX (GEORGIA, IDAHO, NORTH DAKOTA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, VERMONT AND WASHINGTON) WILL HAVE AN OPEN NATIONAL OR STATE VETERANS CEMETERY. GEORGIA AND VERMONT HAVE INDICATED PLANS TO FILE FOR FUNDS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. FUTURE EFFORTS IN THIS PROGRAM WILL FOCUS ON THOSE STATES WHICH DO NOT HAVE AN OPEN CEMETERY FOR VETERANS, AND THOSE AREAS WHERE THE BURIAL NEEDS OF VETERANS ARE NOT FULLY BEING MET.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR STRATEGY FOR MEETING THE INCREASED WORKLOAD DEMANDS WHICH THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IS FACING. WE ARE EMPHASIZING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR MANAGEMENT TEAM, AND STRONGLY ENCOURAGE CEMETERY DIRECTORS TO PURSUE PERSONAL EDUCATIONAL GOALS. ANOTHER INITIATIVE IS AN IMPROVED CLASSIFICATION STANDARD USED FOR GRADING CEMETERY DIRECTOR POSITIONS. IF IMPLEMENTED, THIS WILL MORE ACCURATELY REFLECT THE COMPLEX DUTIES THAT CEMETERY DIRECTORS PERFORM. IT

WILL ALSO MAKE THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM A MORE ATTRACTIVE CAREER OPPORTUNITY FOR POTENTIAL TRAINEES.

AUTOMATION IS ONE OF THE KEY MEANS BY WHICH THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM WILL CONTINUE PROVIDING TIMELY, RESPONSIVE SERVICE TO VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, DESPITE INCREASING WORKLOAD AND CONSTRAINED RESOURCES. THE AUTOMATION OF THE HEADSTONE AND MARKER PROGRAM HAS ENHANCED OPERATING EFFICIENCY, RESULTED IN FASTER SERVICE, AND REDUCED THE POTENTIAL FOR ERROR WHICH EXISTS IN A PAPER-INTENSIVE ENVIRONMENT.

BASIC AUTOMATION CAPABILITIES ARE NOW AVAILABLE AT ALL 68 ACTIVE NATIONAL CEMETERIES, THE THREE SUPERVISING AREA OFFICES, AND CENTRAL OFFICE. EACH FACILITY HAS AT LEAST ONE, AND IN SOME CASES MULTIPLE, PERSONAL COMPUTERS. HAVING MADE THE INITIAL INVESTMENT, OUR NEXT CHALLENGE IS TO TAKE FURTHER ADVANTAGE OF EXISTING CAPABILITIES BY CUSTOMIZING SOFTWARE AND STANDARDIZING APPLICATIONS. THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM WILL MAKE WHATEVER ADVANCES ARE POSSIBLE WITHIN EXISTING RESOURCES.

FORTY-THREE NATIONAL CEMETERIES ARE CONNECTED TO MAIN VA DATA PROCESSING BANKS. THIS CAPABILITY IS IMPORTANT TO IMPROVING SERVICE TO VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, AS IT CAN ASSIST IN MORE TIMELY ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS. IT CAN ALSO AID WITH ON-LINE INPUT AND RETRIEVAL OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA, SUCH AS TIME AND ATTENDANCE REPORTING. AND IT WILL ENABLE THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM TO KEEP PACE WITH OVERALL ADVANCES IN VA'S DATA PROCESSING APPLICATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, VA MEDICAL CENTERS, WHICH PROVIDE SUPPLY SERVICES TO NATIONAL CEMETERIES, ARE CONVERTING TO AN AUTOMATED ORDERING SYSTEM. NATIONAL CEMETERIES MUST BE ABLE TO WORK COMPATIBLY IN THIS AUTOMATED ENVIRONMENT. THEY WILL ALSO NEED TO PARTICIPATE IN VA-WIDE INITIATIVES TO REDUCE PAPERWORK, SUCH AS CONVERTING REGULATIONS TO AN ELECTRONIC RATHER THAN A PRINTED MEDIUM.

WE ARE CONTINUALLY REVIEWING INTERNAL POLICIES TO DETERMINE IF IMPROVEMENTS CAN BE MADE. TWO IMPORTANT CHANGES OVER THE PAST YEAR HAVE BEEN MADE IN ORDER TO PROVIDE MORE RESPONSIVE, COMPASSIONATE SERVICE TO NEXT OF KIN. OCCASIONALLY, CEMETERIES RECEIVE REQUESTS FOR DISINTERMENT, WHICH IN THE PAST HAD TO BE APPROVED IN WASHINGTON BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. THIS WAS UNNECESSARILY TIME CONSUMING, AND VA HAS RECENTLY APPROVED A REGULATION WHICH DECENTRALIZES THIS PROCESS TO THE FIELD. ANOTHER DIRECTIVE REAFFIRMS LONGSTANDING POLICY THAT CEMETERY PERSONNEL WILL EXERT EVERY EFFORT IN ASSISTING NEXT OF KIN WHEN A VETERAN'S DISCHARGE PAPERS ARE NOT AVAILABLE, AND ELIGIBILITY CANNOT READILY BE DETERMINED. OUR PERSONNEL EXPLORE EVERY AVENUE TO ESTABLISH ELIGIBILITY, INCLUDING CHECKS WITH THE NATIONAL PERSONNEL RECORDS CENTER IN ST. LOUIS, POSSIBLE STAYS AT VA MEDICAL CENTERS, OR OTHER BENEFIT INFORMATION.

THE QUALITY OF SERVICE IS GREATLY ASSISTED BY THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS. THE COMMITTEE HAS MADE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM OVER THE YEARS. THEY WILL BE MEETING TOMORROW IN PHOENIX, PRIOR TO TRANSFER CEREMONIES FOR THE NEW CEMETERY.

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM ENCOURAGES PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN CEREMONIES AND BEAUTIFICATION PROJECTS AT THE CEMETERIES. VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS HAVE DEMONSTRATED OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP WITH REGARD TO A VARIETY OF NATIONAL CEMETERY PROJECTS. IN ADDITION, OUTREACH TO GROUPS SUCH AS THE AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION AND THE FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION WILL HELP IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERIES PROGRAM.

THIS CONCLUDES MY FORMAL TESTIMONY, MR. CHAIRMAN. I WOULD BE PLEASED TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS.

STATEMENT BY

RAYMOND J. COSTANZO

SUPERINTENDENT

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING

AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FIRST SESSION, 101ST CONGRESS

13 APRIL 1989

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, I am Raymond J. Costanzo, Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery, and am appearing on behalf of the Secretary of the Army who is responsible for the operation of Arlington National Cemetery. I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to give you a general status report on the operation of Arlington National Cemetery.

On the Virginia side of the Potomac River across from Washington, D.C. lies Arlington National Cemetery, the burial place of many great Americans and a revered shrine to America's war dead.

The cemetery was originally part of a 6,000 acre tract granted in 1669 by the Governor of Virginia to a ship's captain, Robert Howsing, in payment for transporting settlers to the New World. Howsing soon sold his acres, reportedly for six hogsheads of tobacco, to John Alexander, whose family held the land until 1778. At that time, John Parke Custis, son of Martha Washington by her first marriage, bought 1,100 acres--the land which now comprises Arlington Cemetery and the Fort Myer Military Reservation. From that day on, the land would be associated with names famous in American history.

While serving as an Aide to George Washington, John Parke Custis died of illness during the siege of Yorktown in 1781. The future first President then adopted two of Custis' four children, Eleanor and George Washington Parke Custis, and took them to live at Mount Vernon.

The boy became devoted to his step father. When the Custis estate passed into his hands, he made it part of his effort to perpetuate Washington's memory. After first naming the property "Mount Washington," he built a mansion suited to house his mementos of "The Father of Our Country." The mansion was renamed "Arlington House" after the Custis family's original property on Virginia's Eastern Shore which had been acquired by grant from the Earl of Arlington.

George Washington Parke Custis and his wife had four children. Only one lived to maturity: Mary Ann Randolph Custis, born in 1808. In 1831, she married Lieutenant Robert E. Lee, a childhood friend and recent West Point graduate. The Lees, being a military family, traveled much but the house and land at Arlington always remained their home. Upon her death, title was to pass to her eldest son, George Washington Custis Lee. However, the Civil War intervened and the future of Arlington, like so much else, was changed.

Robert Edward Lee returned to Arlington House for the last time on April 18, 1861, four days after the firing on Fort Sumter. He had refused to take command of the federal armies being marshalled to crush the revolt. On April 20 he resigned his commission from the United States Army, stating that "Save in the defense of my native State, I never again desire to draw my sword." Soon after, having dispatched as much as possible of the family pictures, silver, and furniture to a safe place, the Lees left Arlington House forever.

The former home of the Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia soon became a Union Army headquarters and fortifications were erected on its high ground. Forts Whipple and McPherson were the first military installations set up on the Arlington land. They were succeeded by the present day Fort Myer.

The U.S. Government took possession of Arlington under an 1862 "Act for the Collection of Direct Taxes in the Insurrectionary Districts within the United States." Mrs. Lee, who was living within the Confederate lines, attempted to pay the taxes of $92.07 plus penalties through an agent. The payment was refused on the grounds that Mrs. Lee had to make it in person. On January 11, 1864, the tax commissioners bid in the estate to the Federal Government at an evaluation of $26,800 "for Government use, for war, military, charitable, and educational purposes."

On July 17, 1862, President Lincoln approved an omnibus bill Section 18 of which provided that "The President of the United States shall have power, whenever in his opinion it shall be expedient, to purchase cemetery grounds and cause them to be securely enclosed to be used as a national cemetery for the soldiers who shall die in the service of the country." Burial grounds were established that year in Alexandria, Virginia, and on the ground of the Soldiers' Home in Washington. Thus Arlington was not the first national cemetery, though it would become the best known.

Burial space at Alexandria and the Soldiers' Home quickly became scarce. On June 15, 1864, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton formally designated Arlington House and 200 surrounding acres as a military cemetery. The Army Quartermaster General, Brigadier General Montgomery C. Meigs, was charged with creating and administering the new cemetery. Arlington would remain under the Quartermaster General's jurisdiction until the abolition of that office in the 1960's.

The first military burial in Arlington took place on May 13, 1864--a month before Secretary Stanton's Order--when Private William Christman, Company G, 67th Pennsylvania Infantry, was interred. Those buried immediately thereafter were principally soldiers who died in Washington and Alexandria hospitals. Subsequently, the remains of Union soldiers were gathered from the battlefields of Bull Run, Bristol Station, Chantilly, and Aldie, Virginia; from abandoned cemeteries in the District of Columbia; from other points within a 40-mile radius of Washington; and from the military post cemetery at Point Lookout, Maryland. There were some wartime interments of Confederate dead but most of the more than 500 Confederate soldiers now buried in Arlington were veterans who died in the Washington area after the conflict was over. Many former Southern soldiers are grouped around a Confederate monument erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1914. It is the work of Sir Moses Ezekiel, a well known sculptor who served as a youth with the Southern forces. He is buried at the foot of the monument.

The grave of Pierre Charles L'Enfant, engineer, artist, and soldier, lies in front of Arlington House and overlooks the Federal City he designed. It is marked by a table like monument provided for by Congress. South of the Arlington House, a massive granite sarcophagus stands over a vault containing the remains of 2,111 Union dead recovered from the battlefields at Bull Run and the route to the Rappahanock. The Confederate Monument, mentioned earlier, is on the west side of the Cemetery, in Jackson Circle.

The USS Maine Memorial is on Sigsbee Drive. By Act of Congress dated May 9, 1910, the mast of the USS Maine was raised from Havana Harbor and brought to Arlington to honor those who lost their lives in the disastrous explosion and sinking which touched off the Spanish-American War. There are 229 crewman buried in the surrounding section, 167 unknown and 62 known. The names of all those killed are inscribed on the Memorial. In the vault at the base of the Memorial rest, temporarily, the remains of Ignace Jan Paderewski, Polish patriot and musician. Paderewski died in New York City in 1941 while his country was under Nazi occupation. President Roosevelt stipulated that he could lie at Arlington "until Poland is free." The perpetuation of Communist rule in his native land has caused Paderewski's temporary rest at Arlington to be a long one.

Three other monuments honor Spanish-American War dead are located in the Cemetery; a Spanish War Monument dedicated to all soldiers and sailors who died in that war; a Spanish War Nurses Monument; and a monument to Teddy Roosevelt's famed Rough Riders. Other memorials of interest include: the Canadian Cross of Sacrifice, erected by the Canadian Government in honor of U.S. citizens who lost their lives serving in the Canadian Armed Forces during the World Wars or Korea; the Argonne Cross, erected by the Argonne Unit, American Women's Legion in memory of the World War I dead; and a Chaplains Memorial erected by World War I chaplains in memory of 23 comrades who died in that conflict. Recent monument dedications include a memorial to the eight American Servicemen who died in the April 1980 attempt to free the American hostages held in Iran; and a memorial to the seven crew members of the Space Shuttle Challenger who lost their lives in the tragic explosion of the shuttle in January, 1986. A flagpole near the Memorial Amphitheater is dedicated to the memory of Commander Maxwell Woodhull, USN, and his son Brevet Brigadier General Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull, in accordance with General Woodhull's will. It supplements the Cemetery's principle flagpole near the Arlington House.

Preeminent among Arlington's many memorials is the Memorial Amphitheater, and on its plaza, the Tomb Area. Largely through the influence of the Grand Army of the Republic, Congress authorized construction of the Amphitheater in 1908. Funds were appropriated in 1913 and President Woodrow Wilson laid the cornerstone in 1915. Construction was completed on June 30, 1919, and a final dedication took place on May 15, 1920. The Amphitheater, an imposing white marble structure of classic design, occupies 1-1/2 acres and is enclosed by a marble colonnade with entrances at the east and west ends of its principle axes. The west entrance gives the public access to seating within the Amphitheater for ceremonies and other events. At the east entrance, there is an outdoor stage. Behind the stage, within the Amphitheater itself, are display rooms at the main and second floor levels and a chapel in the basement. The latest major addition to the main level display room, which also serves as a reception area for visiting dignitaries, is a plaque dedicated by President Carter dedicated to all who served in the Armed Forces during the Vietnam Era.

The Tomb Area is one of the principal attractions for the more than 4 million visitors who come to Arlington each year. Placing of wreaths at the Tomb by foreign dignitaries and representatives of schools, civic, and fraternal organizations have become familiar occurrences.

The first Unknown, a soldier from World War I, was laid to rest on the Plaza of the Amphitheater during ceremonies presided over by President Warren Harding on Armistice Day, November 11, 1921. A sarcophagus of pure white Colorado marble was erected over the grave in 1932. It bears the inscription:

HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER KNOWN BUT TO GOD

To the left of the sarcophagus, a white marble slab marked 1950-1953 indicates the resting place of an Unknown American Serviceman of the Korean Conflict. To the right, a similar marble slab with the numerals 1941-1945 lies over the grave of an Unknown from World War II. The Unknowns of World War II and the Korean Conflict were interred on Memorial Day 1958, during impressive ceremonies presided over by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon. A marble slab inscribed with the dates 1958-1975, centered between the crypts of the World War II and Korean Unknowns, marks the grave of the Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam Era. President Ronald Reagan presided over the interment services for the Vietnam Unknown on Memorial Day 1984.

More than 212,000 former service members and their spouses and children are buried in Arlington. The dead from all of America's wars are represented. Many who achieved personal distinction, whether in the military or civilian life, have found a final resting place there. Major military figures of the nineteenth century include: Montgomery C. Meigs, the Quartermaster General who first had jurisdiction over the cemetery; General "Fighting Phil" Sheridan; General George Crook; Major General Leonard Wood; and Admirals David D. Porter and William T. Sampson. Others whose reputations in American history are most attributable to their civilian careers are also interred at Arlington. Among these are Captain Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.; Colonel William Jennings Bryan; and Captain Robert Todd Lincoln, son of President Lincoln.

Major figures of the 20th century include Admiral Robert E. Peary; Major Walter Reed; General of the Armies John J. Pershing; Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd; and a host of names familiar to all with knowledge of World War II. General of the Air Force Henry H. (Hap) Arnold; General of the Army George C, Marshall; General of the Army Omar N. Bradley; General Jacob L. Devers; Lieutenant General Claire Chennault; USAF: General Jonathan M. Wainwright; Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr.; and Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy. The most decorated soldier of World War II, Major Audie Murphy, is also buried at Arlington. Major John Foster Dulles; Lieutenant James V. Forrestal, USNR; and astronauts Lieutenant Commander Virgil I. Grissom, USAF; and Lieutenant Commander Roger B. Chaffee, USN, victims of an Apollo training fire in 1967, and Lieutenant Colonel Francis R. (Dick) Scobee, USAF, and Captain Michael J. Smith, USN, crew members of the Space Shuttle Challenger, are among those interred there as well.

Olin E. (Tiger) Teague, one of the most highly decorated soldiers of World War II and former Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee of the United States House of Representatives, General Daniel (Chappie) James, Jr., the first black General Officer in the Air Force, three former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Nathan Twining, USAF, General George S. Brown, USAF, and General Maxwell D. Taylor, USA, and Admiral Hyman Rickover, father of the Nuclear Navy, have been more recently laid to rest.

Supreme Court Justices William O. Douglas, a Private during World War I, and Potter Stewart, a Lieutenant in the Navy during the second World War, have joined four other Supreme Court Justices buried at Arlington. Former Heavyweight Boxing Champion Joe Louis, an Army veteran of World War II, was buried at Arlington in April 1981. Matthew Henson, Co-Discoverer of the North Pole, was laid to rest beside Admiral Peary in April 1988. In recent years, Arlington has become the final resting place for American citizens who have been made the victims of acts of terrorism throughout the world. Twenty-one members of the United States Marine Corps, killed in the bombing of the Marine Compound in Beirut, Lebanon, on October 23, 1983, are buried at Arlington. Seven victims of the terrorist bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut on April 18, 1983 are also buried in the cemetery. Navy Seebee Robert D. Stethem, murdered by hijackers of a TWA jetliner in June 1985. Three sailors killed during the unprovoked Iraqi attack on the USS STARK also rest in Arlington.

Additionally, 24 soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division, killed in a aircraft accident in Gander, New Foundland, also rest in Arlington.

Arlington National Cemetery is also the burial place of two Presidents of the United States. As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, any President is eligible for burial in Arlington, whether or not he has had any previous military service.

William Howard Taft, 27th President of the United States and later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was buried on March 11, 1930. Mrs. Taft was interred beside him on May 25, 1943. Before her death, she arranged for her husband's grave to be marked with a monument designed by the sculptor James E. Fraser. The Commission of Fine Arts and the War Department approved the design.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 35th President and a Navy Lieutenant in World War II, was buried in a special lot in Section 45 of Arlington National Cemetery on November 25, 1963, three days after his assassination in Dallas, Texas. While President, Mr. Kennedy visited Arlington on several occasions. His last visit was on Veterans Day 1963, just 11 days before his assassination, when he placed a wreath at the Tomb Area. On an earlier visit, he stood before the Arlington House and commenting on the beauty and serenity of the scene before him, remarked, "I could stay here forever." His grave is some 300 feet down the terrace from the Mansion. It is in direct line with the Memorial Bridge spanning the Potomac and the Lincoln Memorial on the Washington side of the bridge.

Mr. John C. Warnecki, a distinguished architect and a member of the Commission of Fine Arts, designed the President's permanent memorial and gravesite. Construction began in September 1965. The remains of the President and the two infant Kennedy children were interred in the permanent site on the evening of March 14, 1967. Boston's Cardinal Cushing blessed the gravesite the following day.

Construction and other expenses in the immediate area of the gravesite were paid for by the Kennedy family. The Government paid for the construction of roadways, approaches, and walks leading to the site. Since 1963, millions of Americans and others have visited the President's grave, which with the Tomb Area, is a principle attraction for those who visit Arlington.

Senator Robert F. Kennedy, brother of the slain President, was buried in Section 45 after graveside services were conducted for him on the evening of June 8, 1968. Senator Kennedy was assassinated on June 6 after victory in the California Democratic Presidential Primary. As a United States Senator with prior military service in the Navy during World War II, Mr. Kennedy was eligible for burial in Arlington.

For the millions who visit Arlington, as for all Americans, the cemetery is a national shrine. For this reason every effort is made to insure Arlington is maintained in a condition commensurate with its prestige and inspirational importance. Recent years have seen the development and integration of an expanded 612-acre Arlington, with improved landscaping of older areas, and preparation of new sections complete with trees, shrubs, turf, and watering facilities. Both the Memorial Amphitheater and the Tomb Area have been refurbished, and a new Administration building has been erected. Most recently, two phases of a Columbarium for the inurnment of cremated remains have been completed. It is open to all honorably discharged veterans, their spouses, and dependent children. Eventually, there will be 50,000 niches for cremated remains.

Construction of a new Visitors Center and parking facility began in late 1986. These new facilities, designed to better serve the visiting public and reduce interference with funeral services, were opened in January 1989.

The Classically Architectured building, with its Roman Doric columns, not only meets the needs of approximately 4 million visitors annually, but also ensures that one's first impression of Arlington will be one of dignity and beauty. The center can accommodate 3,000 visitors per during peak visitation periods. There is parking for 600 cars and vans and 42 buses. Gravesite information is more accessible, alleviating long lines often during inclement weather. Photographs and displays, detailing Arlington's history, add to a visit to the cemetery and enhance the very image of our nation's most hallowed shrine.

With the opening of this new facility, a paid-parking system was initiated. Under this plan, all visitors utilizing the parking facility will be charged a nominal parking fee. All funds received from this operation will be returned to the United States Treasury to pay back the cost of construction. Friends and relatives desiring to visit their loved ones gravesite are not required to pay any fees. The general public has not complained about the parking fees.

Since 1967, following a great increase in the demand for gravesites after the interment of President Kennedy, eligibility for ground burial in Arlington has been restricted to a relatively small portion of those who have served in the Armed Forces, their spouses and minor or dependent children. The purpose of these restrictions is to keep Arlington an active cemetery for as long as possible. At the present rate of burial, approximately 16 daily, Monday thru Friday, it is projected that the cemetery will not be filled until the year 2020.

At the close of fiscal year 1988, the remains of 210,409 persons were interred/inurned in Arlington National Cemetery. Of this total, 202,146 persons were interred and 8,263 remains inurned in the Columbarium in Arlington National Cemetery. In fiscal year 1988, services were conducted for 4,344 persons, which included 69 General and Flag Officers. In fiscal year 1989 and 1990, burials and inurnments are projected to be 4,550 and 4,750 respectively. Approximately 16 interments are accomplished daily.

The second 5,000 niche unit of the Columbarium was opened in April 1986, to accommodate inurnment of cremated remains of honorably discharged veterans not otherwise eligible for burial at Arlington. Design and construction funds for the next 10,000 niche increment were approved for fiscal year 1988, and construction is anticipated for July 1989.

In addition to its principle function as a national cemetery, Arlington is the site of many nonfuneral ceremonies each year. In fiscal year 1988, 2,449 such ceremonies were conducted. A like number of ceremonies is anticipated for fiscal years 1989 and 1990. Arlington National Cemetery has approximately 4 million visitors annually, and is one of the most visited sites in the National Capitol Region.

The Department of the Army fully supports the intent of Section 344 of Public Law 100-322 as it applies to the use of graveliners at Arlington National Cemetery.

For many years, we have sought ways of avoiding some of the problems that mar the appearance of burial areas, and contribute to excessive long range costs. The principle problems are sunken graves and tipped headstones.

Numerous studies have been conducted in an effort to find an economical solution to resolve these two problems. All the studies have conclusively established that the major factor causing these problems was the fact that we do not require that a vault or concrete graveliner be used for all burials.

When vaults or concrete graveliners are used, the gravesite is immediately stabilized. If the burial is made without a vault or concrete graveliner, the soil in the grave will continue to settle as the casket deteriorates. As this deterioration advances, initially the wooden box and then ultimately the casket collapse. The soil below the headstone is drawn into the grave to fill the void. The studies have pointed out that decomposition continues for about 20 years with 9 distinct movements of the soil.

Following are pertinent statistics:

During fiscal year 1988 there were 3,121 interments; 1,027 interments were made in vaults or concrete graveliners purchased and paid for by the next of kin; and 2,094 interments used either wooden box or casket only.

During the 20 year period following interment, there will be 9 distinct movements of the soil in those gravesites where vaults or liners were not used. After that period, gravesites become stabilized and require only minimal maintenance.

The most severe settlement occurs during the first 5 years. Our records indicate that 10 work hours are required for refilling these gravesites during that period and that 5 work hours per grave are required during the remaining 15 years. In addition to refilling and sodding the gravesite after each sinkage, the headstones must be reset and realigned. The total cost of labor, materials and resetting the headstone for each gravesite over the 20 year period is estimated at $200.00.

The above estimated cost indicates the savings that could be gained if graveliners or vaults are used. The intangible benefits of improved cemetery appearance are considered even more important.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks, and I will be pleased to respond to your questions at this time.

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
April 13, 1989

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Battle Monuments Commission welcomes the opportunity to provide information to the Subcommittee about its current operations and the shrines for which it is responsible.

The principal functions of the Commission are to commemorate the sacrifices and achievements of the American Armed Forces since April 6, 1917 through the erection of suitable memorial shrines; to design, construct, operate and maintain permanent American military burial grounds in foreign countries; to control the design and construction of U.S. military monuments and markers in foreign countries by U.S. citizens and organizations both public and private; and to encourage the maintenance of such monuments and markers by their sponsors. In performing these functions, the Commission administers, operates and maintains 24 permanent American military burial grounds, 14 separate monuments and 4 memorials in 12 countries around the world.

Prior to 1923, no federal agency was responsible for commemorating the sacrifices and achievements of U.S. Armed Forces. After the allied victory in World War I, many American troop units erected monuments and markers to themselves where they had served in Europe. These monuments and markers came in assorted sizes, shapes and descriptions. Too often, they bore little relationship to the achievements of the units, were poorly designed and constructed, were erected on land not owned by the units and were without provision for future maintenance.

When the decision was made by the War Department that a federal agency should be responsible for honoring American Armed Forces where they served, legislation was enacted in 1923 creating the American Battle Monuments Commission. General John J. Pershing was appointed by President Harding to the newly formed Commission in 1923 and was elected Chairman by the other members. General George C. Marshall became Chairman in 1948, General Jacob L. Devers in 1959, General Mark W. Clark in 1967 and General Andrew J. Goodpaster, the present Chairman, in 1985.

The Commission's World War I commemorative program consisted of the erection of non-sectarian chapel in each of the eight permanent American military cemeteries on foreign soil established by the War Department for the Dead of that war, the landscaping of each of these cemeteries and the erection of eleven separate monuments elsewhere in Europe. Use of all of these sites as cemeteries or memorials was granted to the U.S. in perpetuity without charge or taxation.

In 1934, by Presidential Executive Order, the Commission was given responsibility for the eight existing permanent American military burial grounds in Europe, and for the design, construction, operation and maintenance of future permanent American military burial grounds erected on foreign soil.

At the end of World War II, several hundred temporary military burial grounds had been established by the U.S. Army in battle areas around the world. Fourteen sites in foreign countries were selected jointly by the Secretary of the Army and the American Battle Monuments Commission to become permanent World War II cemetery memorial sites. The locations of these sites corresponded closely to the course of military operations during the war. These burial grounds were turned over to the Commission after the interments in them had been completed by the American Graves Registration Service in the configuration proposed by the cemetery architect and approved by the Commission.

Like the World War I cemeteries, the use of most of the World War II sites as permanent military burial grounds was granted in perpetuity by the host countries, free of charge or taxation. Exceptions to this site grant situation still exist to different degrees in the Philippines, Tunisia, Panama, Mexico City and Cambridge in England.

Except in the Philippines, burial was limited by agreement with the host countries to members of the U.S. Armed Forces who died overseas during the war. U.S. civilian technicians, Red Cross workers and entertainers serving the military were treated as members of the Armed Forces insofar as burial entitlement was concerned. The agreement with the Philippine government permitted members of the Philippine Scouts and Philippine Army units that fought with U.S. Forces in the Philippines also to be interred in the Manila American Cemetery. All of the Commission's World War I and II cemeteries are closed to burials except for remains of American War Dead still found from time to time in World War I and II battle areas.

The final disposition of World War I and II remains was carried out under the provisions of Public Law 389, 66th Congress and Public Law 368, 80th Congress, respectively. Authority to make further disposition of World War I remains was terminated by Public Law 389 on August 15, 1921; authority to make further disposition of World War II remains was terminated by Public Law 368 on December 31, 1951. From time to time, requests are received from relatives asking that previous notarized declarations regarding final disposition of World War I and II remains be disregarded. Those making such requests are informed that the decision of the next of kin of record at the time of interment was final. Often, on seeing the great beauty and immaculate care of the Commission's cemetery memorials, these same individuals tell us later that they are pleased that the remains of their loved ones are permanently interred in these shrines.

Interred in a mass grave at the Commission's Mexico City National Cemetery are 750 unidentified American Dead of the War of 1847. Additionally, 813 American veterans, civilians and foreign nationals are interred in wall crypts. Most of the interments in the Mexico City National Cemetery were made during the 1800's while it was being administered by the War Department. It was closed to further interments in 1924 and passed to the jurisdiction of ABMC on July 16, 1947.

The President directed by Executive Order on January 19, 1979, that the American Battle Mouments Commission assume responsibility for approximately 4,800 American military and civilian graves in the Panama Canal Zone effective October 1, 1979. The cemetery in which the remains are located has been designated as the Corozal American Cemetery. It is the only non-World War military cemetery on foreign soil to be taken over by this Commission since the Mexico City National Cemetery in 1947. Beginning with the Korean War, all recovered remains of U.S. military War Dead, except for five remains in the U.N. cemetery in Korea, have been returned to the United States or its territories or possessions for burial.

Interred in ABMC cemeteries are the remains of 30,920 War Dead of World War I, 93,240 of World War II and 750 of the Mexican War of 1847. These statistics do not include the 4,872 remains interred in the Corozal American Cemetery, as most are not War Dead. Inscribed on the headstones of the Unknowns buried in ABMC's World War I cemeteries is: "HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER KNOWN BUT TO GOD." The inscription was altered in ABMC's World War II cemeteries to reflect the tri-service nature of the casualties as follows: "HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY A COMRADE IN ARMS KNOWN BUT TO GOD." The memorials at the Commission's cemeteries in foreign countries together with three of the Commission's four memorials in the United States commemorate by name the 94,092 servicemen and women Missing in Action or lost or buried at sea during World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The names of these heroic dead are engraved on Tablets of the Missing at the Commission's cemetery or memorial closest to the location where they lost their lives.

The policy-making body of the Commission consists of 11 members appointed by the President for an indefinite term who serve without pay. They meet with the professional staff of the Commission once or twice annually. The Commission has 385 full-time civilian employees, and 6 military officers who work for it by arrangement with the Department of Defense. Fifty-one of the civilian employeee are U.S. citizens. Of these U.S. civilian employees, 38 are superintendents, and assistant superintendents at the cemeteries and the remainder are administrative personnel. The other civilian positions are filled by foreign nationals, hired from local applicants in the countries where our facilities are located. These foreign nationals perform general maintenance at the cemeteries and clerical and administrative work in the field offices. Twelve employees (4 military and 8 U.S. civilians in administrative positions) are assigned to the Washington Office. Field offices located in Paris, France (1 military, 5 U.S. civilians and 27 local national civilians) and Rome, Italy (1 military and 6 local national civilians) report to the Washington Office. These offices oversee operations at the individual cemeteries in the European and the Mediterranean areas. The Paris Office supervises operations in Belgium, England,

France, Luxembourg and The Netherlands, while the Rome Office oversees operations in Tunisia, Italy and Gibralter. The superintendent of the cemeteries in Mexico City, Panama and the Philippines report directly to the Washington Office. All cemetery superintendents and assistant superintendents are U.S. citizens and veterans, selected for their administrative ability, knowledge of horticulture, maintenance and construction, and ability to use compassion and tact in dealing with the public.

Sec. 1601 of Public Law 100-687 was enacted in October of the past year authorizing ABMC to restore, operate and maintain the Pacific War Memorial and selected other historical and memorial sites on Corregidor Island in the Republic of the Philippines. Implementation is conditional on an agreement between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States. The two governments are generally in accord except for the length of time that the agreement will remain in effect. No action will be taken by ABMC to perform any restoration until the agreement has been formally signed and funds made available for that purpose either through private contribution or an appropriation.

Excellent progress is being made on the Korean War Veterans Memorial. To date, more than 33,000 donors have contributed over 3 million dollars. This is over half of the overall design, maintenance and construction costs of 6 million dollars that is required. A superb site on the Mall, Ash Woods, has been approved for the memorial. It is adjacent to the Lincoln Memorial and directly across the Reflecting Pool from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. A design competition open to all Americans 18 years of age and older is well underway. The winners of the competition are scheduled to be announced by June 1, 1989, at which time action to obtain the necessary design approvals will commence. We hope to award the construction contract by the middle of 1990. Obtaining the needed contributions in a timely manner is most important since a building permit cannot be obtained until the entire cost of construction and maintenance is on deposit in the U.S. Treasury for those purposes.

Our mission to erect a memorial on Guadalcanal Island memorializing those Americans who lost their lives in the liberation of the Solomon Islands during World War II is progressing satisfactorily. Agreement has been reached with the government of the Solomon Islands for the perpetual lease of a beautiful memorial site high above the capital city of Honiara on Guadalcanal. The land will be free of all rent, taxes, and other fees. Detailed design drawings should be completed soon, at which time the major memorial stone will be ordered for shipment. Anticipated completion time for the monument is early next year.

The following information and services are provided without cost to friends and relatives of those interred in or memorialized at the Commission's cemeteries and memorials: name, location and general information about the cemetery or memorials in which they are interested; plot, row and grave number if appropriate; best routes

and modes of travel in-country to the cemetery or memorial; general information about accommodations available in the vicinity of the cemeteries and memorials; letters authorizing fee-free passports for members of the immediate family traveling overseas specifically to visit a grave or memorial site; black and white photographs of headstones and sections of the Tablets of the Missing on which the servicemen's names are engraved; large color lithographs of the cemeteries and memorials on which photographs of the appropriate headstones or Tablets of the Missing are mounted; and arrangements for floral decorations of grave and memorial sites.

Over 12 million people visit the Commission's cemeteries and memorials annually; about 20 percent of the visitors overseas are Americans. Our visitors have included Presidents and Vice Presidents of the United States, American and foreign diplomats and senior government officials, members of Congress, members of foreign royal families, and senior American and foreign military officers. President Reagan and seven other Heads of State visited Normandy in 1984, the 40th Anniversary of the D-Day landings, to pay homage to the Americans who died during the D-Day landings on Omaha and Utah Beaches and the subsequent fighting which took place in that area.

The Commission's annual budget is 14 to 15 million dollars. Its expenses fall into two major categories: commemoration of U.S. Armed Forces through the erection of suitable memorial shrines and care and maintenance of the military burial grounds, monuments and memorials for which it is responsible. The Commission's appropriation request for Fiscal Year 1990 is $14,507,000, $412,000 less than the recently amended Fiscal Year 1989 requests.

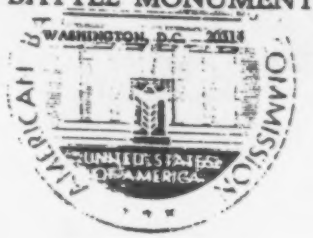
Because the value of the dollar last year continued to fall on the foreign markets where our installations are located, additional foreign currency costs to the Commission totaled $1,246,000. Fortunately, sufficient funds remained in our Fiscal Year 1987 Supplemental Appropriation for currency fluctuation to offset such losses. Our current Appropriation contains $829,000 specifically for this purpose. These funds have been transferred to the U.S. Treasury and placed in the Foreign Currency Fluctuation Account, American Battle Monuments Commission, which was established by Sec. 345, P.L. 100-322. During the first quarter of the current fiscal year, the dollar has remained fairly stable and close to our budgeted currency exchange rates. However, if the value of the dollar declines further, the funds in the Foreign Currency Fluctuation Account could be depleted.

Of special concern to ABMC in connection with the lower dollar exchange rates is our deferred maintenance situation. As the ages of our World War II structures approach 40 years, our budget constraints, aggravated by the falling value of the dollar overseas, have caused our backlog of maintenance and capital improvement projects to increase from $3,700,000 in January 1986 to almost $6,500,000.

A few of our installations overseas are located in somewhat isolated and environmentally difficult areas. The supervisors responsible for these cemeteries can seldom identify closely with other U.S. Government agency elements and must struggle to become a part of the community. A special degree of dedication to the job is required of our people when the political situation in the host country is such that U.S. citizens are less than welcome and their concerns of uncertainty and insecurity and for physical safety lead to feelings of isolation and even depression. This is the circumstance we now find in Panama where our Corozal American Cemetery personnel are being harrassed by the anti-American regime in power. Hopefully a solution will be found but indications are that the crisis will only get worse. ABMC is but a tiny representation of the U.S. Government in Panama, but we join with other agencies in expressing our concern for the well being of our interests there.

Mr. Chairman, this completes the Commission's prepared statement.

THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION



10 April 1989

Honorable G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery
Chairman
Committee on Veterans Affairs
House of Representatives
335 CHOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of April 4, 1989 and the opportunity to give you our views on H.R. 1414 which would enable the appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Forces as well as commissioned officers to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

The Commission has no objection to the amendment to 36 U.S.C. 121 contained in H.R. 1414. No additional costs will be entailed to the Commission as the result of enactment of the proposed legislation.

The Office of Management and Budget has advised that it has no objection to the presentation of this report to the Congress from the standpoint of the Administration's programs.

Sincerely,

A. J. Adams

A. J. ADAMS
Major General, USA
Secretary

NCOA

Non Commissioned Officers Association of the United States of America

225 N. Washington Street • Alexandria, Virginia 22314 • Telephone (703) 549-0311

Statement of

Richard W. Johnson, Jr.
Director of Legislative Affairs

before the

Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

on

Cemetery System Oversight

April 13, 1989

The Non Commissioned Officers Association of the USA sincerely appreciates the opportunity to comment on the National Cemetery System and legislation to provide for the appointment of enlisted members to the American Battle Monuments Commission. In this statement NCOA will expound on its strong support for H.R. 1414, and will comment on national cemetery system expansion, the expanded use of graveliners, and on proposals by Messrs. Solomon and Hammerschmidt to prohibit the collection of parking fees at Arlington National Cemetery.

H.R. 1414

Since it was created in 1923 the American Battle Monuments Commission has been responsible for the design, construction, operation and maintenance of American cemeteries in foreign countries and certain battle monuments in the U.S. and abroad. Through the dedicated efforts of its commissioners and employees this independent agency has maintained the honor and dignity of American participation in military actions to preserve freedom worldwide.

Also since its inception, service on the commission has been limited by law to commissioned officers. Such restrictions were characteristic of the times. Nevertheless, it is the enlisted servicemember who bears the brunt of any battle preceding the creation of a memorial. Appropriately, they should be represented on the commission. Accordingly, NCOA is pleased to offer its strong support for H.R. 1414 which would authorize the appointment of enlisted commissioners at the American Battle Monuments Commission.

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

Since assuming responsibility for operation of the National Cemetery System under provisions of the National Cemetery Act of 1973, the Department of Veterans Affairs has done an outstanding job in accommodating the memorial affairs needs of veterans. The Association takes this opportunity to applaud the management and staff of the cemetery system for their efforts.

Soon after the cemetery system was assimilated into what was then the Veterans Administration a major review of expansion policy was conducted. The VA soon decided to abandon previous and mostly "pork barrel" criteria for developing new cemeteries. Instead, the agency announced it would adopt a new concept for cemetery development by establishing a Regional Cemetery System. Thus the agency embarked on a fifteen year program to establish a major cemetery in each federal region culminating with the opening of the Fort Mitchell National Cemetery in Region IV last year.

The regional cemetery policy was and is a wise alternative to the haphazard development which occurred prior to its adoption, but it is not a stand alone solution to accommodating the memorial needs of veterans. A federal region is just too large to be served by a single cemetery. More than ten years of experience with the system demonstrates that more than half of all internments in regional cemeteries are veterans whose families reside within 50 miles of the cemetery. Most are from within the state where the cemetery is located. Additionally, while the current system has potentially 3.5 million gravesites, this is far short of fulfilling the needs of the 20 million veterans expected to die between now and 2020.

However, the DVA has remained resolute in insisting the system not be expanded beyond the regional cemetery concept. Instead, the DVA has vested all future growth of the system in state participation in the grant program. This policy all but abrogates federal responsibility for meeting veterans burial needs.

As the committee is aware, regional cemeteries serve less than 40 percent of veterans. But, augmenting the regional

cemeteries with facilities in ten major population centers would more than double the number of veterans living within 50 miles of an open national cemetery.

Two years ago Congress appropriated funds to take the first step toward regional cemetery augmentation. Congress appropriated funds to conduct environmental impact studies for new cemeteries in Albany, NY; Cleveland, OH; Chicago, IL; and, Seattle/Tacoma, WA. Contracts to conduct those studies have been executed. Yet the DVA has not taken the next step. Accordingly, we believe Congress must.

NCOA recommends the committee take such steps as are necessary to provide at least $2 million for preliminary design and site acquisition funding for the four cemeteries discussed above. The Association also encourages the committee to continue to explore the possibility of establishing cemeteries in other "demographically optimum locations" identified in the June 1987 cemetery study or such other data as may be current and appropriate.

GRAVE LINERS

Mr. Chairman, notwithstanding the authority provided in Public Law 100-322. The Department of Veterans Affairs simply does not have the funding to use graveliners as extensively as it would like in national cemeteries.

Graveliners are used in national cemeteries for three basic reasons. Foremost their use reduces maintenance costs associated with casket collapse, earth settlement and other natural degradation requiring periodic back-fill and landscaping. Second, the graveliners reduce the need for headstone realignment. Finally, they tend to reduce employee and visitor injury caused by falls on uneven ground. By DVA estimates the cost of graveliners is easily offset by the savings recognized in maintenance and liability.

Because of funding limitations graveliners are currently used only in Massachusetts, Calverton and Riverside National Cemeteries. Hopefully the committee will give the DVA greater encouragement and funding to increase graveliner use.

PARKING FEES

Both Mr. Solomon and Mr. Hammerschmidt have recently proposed legislation which would preclude the collection of parking fees at Arlington National Cemetery. NCOA recognizes the need to control commuter parking at the cemetery, but we believe that can be done by limiting parking hours and length of stay. Collecting parking fees at such a national landmark has a connotation too commercial to suit NCOA. Therefore NCOA endorses proposals to prohibit the collection of such fees.

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF
RICHARD F. SCHULTZ
ASSOCIATE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
April 13, 1989

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the more than 1.2 million members of the Disabled American Veterans and its Ladies' Auxiliary, I wish to thank you for this opportunity to present our views relative to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) National Cemetery Service, Arlington National Cemetery and a bill affecting the American Battle Monuments Commission.

At the outset, Mr. Chairman, the DAV wishes to commend you for exercising your oversight responsibilities relative to the issues before us here today. This timely action clearly demonstrates your commitment to assure that our nation's veterans will have a suitable final resting place available to them.

Mr. Chairman, in your letter of invitation to appear here today, you indicated that today's oversight hearing will focus on the implementation of Public Law 100-322, relative to the installation of graveliners in our national cemeteries; existing workload and further expansion plans for the National Cemetery System; Arlington National Cemetery; and H.R. 1414, a measure which would provide for the appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Forces to the American Battle Monuments Commission. With your permission I will now address these issues.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, more than a century ago, President Lincoln signed into law a measure authorizing the interment of the remains of individuals who died in military service defending the freedom we enjoy. Public Law 94-43 placed the current National Cemetery System under the jurisdiction of the VA in 1973.

With the recent addition of the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona, the National Cemetery System now consists of 113 cemeteries located in 39 states and Puerto Rico. However, of these 113 national cemeteries, 46 are closed and by the year

2000 it is projected that nearly 75% of all national cemeteries will be closed.

Currently, there are 12 states with no national cemetery and an additional four states where national cemeteries are closed to new interments. Simply put, more than 30% of the 50 states have no national cemetery gravesites.

Mr. Chairman, at present, approximately 70% of our nation's veteran population resides within 100 miles of a national cemetery -- thus having reasonable access to a national cemetery. However, it is estimated that, should no new national cemeteries be constructed and existing national cemeteries allowed to close, by the year 2020 less than one-half of our nation's veterans will reside within a reasonable distance of a national cemetery.

In June 1987, the VA issued a report entitled, "Report on the VA National Cemetery System." This report, required by Public Law 99-576, describes the anticipated future demands to be placed on the National Cemetery System, listing 10 geographical locations where the need for additional burial space is greatest. We are pleased to note that environmental impact studies are underway at four of these locations. However, we continue to oppose the DVA's persistence to continue a national cemetery policy based on the regional concept.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the demand for burial in national cemeteries continues to increase. Since 1983 interments have increased by more than 35%. During the first four months of Fiscal Year 1989, national cemetery interments are up 7.4% over the same period last year. Also, the National Cemetery Service projects total interments for 1989 could far exceed earlier predictions.

Additionally, by the year 2020 more than one-half of our nation's veteran population will reside more than 100 miles from an open national cemetery. We believe DVA's policy for future expansion of the National Cemetery System is too restrictive and recommend a more aggressive approach to solving the problem of providing accessible burial space for all of America's veterans.

In addressing the issue of providing reasonably accessible gravesites for our nation's veteran population, DAV National Convention delegates have, for the past several years, adopted a resolution expressing our belief that any expansion of the

National Cemetery System should be based on a policy which contains the ultimate goal of providing at least one national cemetery in each state. Such a policy, we believe, will provide a final resting place relatively close to a veteran's home and family.

Mr. Chairman, the DAV applauds the efforts of the National Cemetery Service to provide our nation's veterans and their families with timely compassionate services. However, if they are to meet the increased demands placed upon them, sufficient FTEE must be made available. As noted earlier, there has been an increased demand for interments in national cemeteries of more than 35% since 1983. However the increase in FTEE over that same period is only 4.1%. Clearly, FTEE levels have not kept pace with increased workloads.

* * *

Mr. Chairman, the DAV certainly appreciates the efforts of the Subcommittee relative to the use of graveliners in national cemeteries. As you know, Section 344 of Public Law 100-322 authorizes the use of graveliners for interment of caskets in the National Cemetery System and Arlington National Cemetery. Currently, graveliners are being used at nine national cemeteries.

DAV National Convention delegates have taken a position in support of a uniform policy to provide cement graveliners in all national cemeteries. As you know, graveliners have proven to be cost effective by reducing maintenance and repair cost. Also, their use adds to the aesthetic qualities of our national cemeteries by eliminating the unsightly sinkage that occurs as caskets collapse.

We are concerned that since Public Law 100-322 does not require the use of graveliners for all new interments at national cemeteries, it will have little effect on the current limited use of graveliners in national cemeteries. We therefore would suggest a change to current law requiring the use of graveliners in all national cemeteries.

* * *

Mr. Chairman, for more than 120 years Arlington National Cemetery has been one of our nation's most cherished and sacred shrines. These hallowed grounds hold the remains of more

than 200,000 veterans and their dependents. These burial sites containing the remains of former presidents, famous sports figures, military officers and enlisted men, are visited by more than four million people annually.

Today, Arlington National Cemetery has approximately 45,000 gravesites available in developed areas of the cemetery with enough space for another 40,000 gravesites in undeveloped areas. It is projected that by the year 2020 no additional gravesites will be available in Arlington Cemetery.

Since 1980, Arlington has been accepting the cremated remains of veterans and certain family members for placement in the Columbarium. It is anticipated that the Columbarium will be able to accept cremated remains until at least the year 2050.

Mr. Chairman, we believe the staff at Arlington National Cemetery, under the stewardship of Mr. Ray Costanzo, does an outstanding job assisting family members and the many individuals who visit the cemetery each year and with the addition of the new Visitors Center dedicated in January of this year, the services at Arlington National Cemetery have been greatly enhanced.

* * *

Mr. Chairman, the DAV has no National Convention mandate relative to H.R. 1414, a bill which would provide for the appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Forces to the America Battle Monuments Commission. Therefore, we have no position on this measure.

This concludes my statement Mr. Chairman. Again, we wish to thank you for the invitation to appear here today to express our views on these important issues.

Statement of

The American Legion

1608 K STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006

by

SAMUEL J. WALSH, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION

and

RICHARD CHRISTIAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION

before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

THE NATIONAL CEMETARY SYSTEM AND THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

April 13, 1989

STATEMENT OF RICHARD S. CHRISTIAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APRIL 13, 1989

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Legion appreciates this opportunity to appear before this Subcommittee to express its views concerning oversight of the National Cemetery System, Arlington National Cemetery, and the American Battle Monuments Commission.

First however, The American Legion would like to commend this Subcommittee for its vital role in the formulation and passage of PL 100-322. This extensive piece of legislation responds to several concerns our organization has expressed over a number of years concerning the National Cemetery System's activities, programs and benefits.

During the 1970's, the Department of Veterans Affairs conducted a test program on the use of graveliners at cemeteries in Bourne, Massachusetts; Calverton, New York; and Riverside, California, among others. That program, with the exception of the aforementioned sites, was subsequently eliminated due to budgeting constraints. However, budgetary constraint is not the only factor to be considered in this issue. The availability of land that is suited for gravesites is decreasing due to expanded land use by industrial and housing needs. In addition, the cost of land that is available is increasing at a phenomenal rate. This leads to usage of land that, many times, may be less than desirable for cemetery development.

The use of graveliners in private cemeteries is commonplace, and oftentimes a requirement. The use of graveliners better protects the casket and remains, drastically reduces maintenance costs and efforts, and greatly improves the overall appearance of the cemetery, mainly by stabilizing the headstones and preventing the ground from sinking over a collapsing casket.

PL 100-322 authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide a graveliner for any grave within the National Cemetery System. We would encourage the Secretary to fully exercise that authority.

Mr. Chairman, it is a documented fact that the demands on the National Cemetery System will significantly increase in the next 3 or 4 decades. Statistics pertaining to the aging veteran population, as well the National Cemetery System's past and projected workload statistics, unequivocally confirm this statement. The American Legion is convinced, however, that resources, in the form of money and FTEE, have not kept pace with expanding workloads of this department.

As of April 1, 1989, there were 113 national cemeteries in existence. An additional cemetery is under development in Northern California. Due to the aging veteran population, FY 1988 recorded a record of 56,216 interments. Those numbers are rising steadily.

The FY 1990 budget proposal reflected a net increase of $3,195,000. However, it now appears that current funding has proven inadequate to meet existing needs. Equipment needs and maintenance of existing equipment is lagging. The current budget does not allow for unforeseen environmental effects. The 1988 drought caused excessive turf damage and killed large numbers of trees. Replacement and repairs are needed to maintain the appearance of the national cemeteries. Monies for this necessary maintenance should be budgeted, not covered by the diversion of funds from other areas.

The American Legion has noted with interest Chapter 9 of VA's report on the National Cemetery System, entitled: "Plans for Meeting Veterans Future Burial Needs." The opening paragraph states: "Projected increases in demand for burial in national cemeteries, coupled with progressive closures of now open national cemeteries, make it extremely important to develop long-range plans for meeting future veteran burial needs."

As of the 1987 report, 65 cemeteries were receiving interments. By the year 2020, 36, or more than half, will be closed. It takes approximately 7 years from inception to open a new cemetery.

The report included a list of 10 key locations in which cemeteries are needed to meet future needs of the system. New cemeteries at these locations would also compensate for the closure of the previously noted 36 sites. These sites, developed as a result of the aforementioned report, prepared in response to PL 99-576, should be given immediate consideration.

Currently, national cemeteries are located within 100 miles of 70 percent of the veteran population. Officials of the National Cemetery System project that simply maintaining the current system, without allowing for demographic change, will reduce that percentage to 40 percent by the year 2020. In order to maintain the current level of service, demographic changes and their effects must be taken into consideration in the placement of new cemeteries.

The Delegates to the 1988 National Convention of The American Legion adopted Resolution No. 246 (AZ - copy attached) placing the Legion in support of further development and expansion of the National Cemetery System. That resolution further

calls for The American Legion to support necessary funding for the construction of columbaria wherever feasible; to sponsor and support legislation to restore the burial allowance for all honorably discharged veterans; and to provide that the burial allowances shall not be in an amount less than $400.00

We have been asked to comment on H.R. 1441. This bill would amend current law to allow for the appointment of enlisted members to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

The American Legion is supportive of this proposal which, in effect, recognizes the capabilities and the dedication of the enlisted personnel currently in the Armed Forces.

Before we conclude, Mr. Chairman, we would like to note that we maintain a close working relationship with the National Cemetery System. The American Legion is very much aware of the sensitivity of the responsibilities of the national cemetery officials, and the expert manner in which they carry out their duties despite the increasing number of burials. We are concerned that the quality of maintenance will suffer if the resources provided do not keep pace with the increasing workload. According to National Cemetery System estimates, over 610,000 veterans will die by the year 2010. Based on those statistics alone, it is clearly evident that the system will encounter extreme difficulty in maintaining the quality of service now provided.

We would like to conclude by stating that if new cemeteries are to be added to the system, it is important that sufficient resources are provided to operate them, and that the resources are not taken from existing cemeteries.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes our statement. We would be happy to respond to any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have at this time.

SEVENTIETH NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
SEPTEMBER 6, 7, 8, 1988

RESOLUTION NO: 246 (ARIZONA)

SUBJECT: SPONSOR AND SUPPORT LEGISLATION TO AMEND 38 USC, TO RESTORE THE PAYMENT OF BURIAL ALLOWANCE FOR ALL VETERANS; AND TO INCREASE THE BURIAL ALLOWANCE FOR VETERANS TO $400

COMMITTEE: VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION

WHEREAS, The National Cemetery System of the Veterans Administration is proceeding with development and expansion of the National Cemetery System; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion supports the actions of the Veterans Administration to further develop and expand the National Cemetery System; and

WHEREAS, Legislation enacted by Congress and signed by the President in 1981 took away the burial benefit, previously provided for the burial for all honorably discharged war veterans and restricted that benefit to certain categories of veterans; and

WHEREAS, Based on its support of the principles of equal benefits for equal service, The American Legion has strongly supported the equity of the provision of the burial benefit to all honorably discharged war veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Louisville, Kentucky, September 6, 7, 8, 1988, that The American Legion shall support necessary funding providing for the construction of columbaria wherever feasible within national cemeteries; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to restore the burial allowance as a benefit to be provided for the burial of all honorably discharged war veterans and provided further that this burial allowance shall not be in an amount less than $400.00.

STATEMENT OF
FRANK R. DE GEORGE, ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
CONCERNING
OVERSIGHT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM, ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY,
AND
H.R. 1414, pertaining to the
AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION
APRIL 13, 1989

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee, Paralyzed Veterans of America appreciates this opportunity to present its views regarding the implementation of Public Law 100-322, as it relates to the installation of graveliners in our national cemeteries, existing workloads and future expansion plans for the national cemetery system. Additionally, we are pleased to address H.R. 1414, a bill, "to provide for the appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Forces to the American Battle Monuments Commission."

PVA believes the rapidly aging veteran population dictates the need for expansion of the Department of Veterans Affairs' [DVA] cemetery system. For over two hundred years this Nation has provided suitable final resting places for the men and women who have served defending it and it is most appropriate that this tradition be continued. To do otherwise would be to break the long standing national commitment of this Nation and to demean the sacrifices of our veterans.

PVA continues to advocate for the location of a DVA cemetery in every state. It is fitting and deserving that veterans of this Nation be laid to rest near their family and loved ones. Due to the closure of 51 cemeteries through 1989, nineteen states will have no national cemetery or have cemeteries that are closed to new interments; and from 1990 to 1994, an additional 10 cemeteries will be closed. By the turn of the century, 8 more will close.

The cemetery system is experiencing a steadily increasing workload in interments. DVA projects an increase of approximately 56,500 interments for 1989. The number of graves that must be maintained continues to increase to a projected 1989 level of 1,775,000.

As stated in the "Independent Budget," previously submitted to the full Committee, by the year 2000, 69 of the cemeteries existing in the system today will be closed to new gravesites. The need for a significant increase in available and accessible gravesites is obvious. We do encourage the efforts to expand the grant's for State Veterans' Cemeteries, however, this effort, alone, will not adequately provide for the final need of our Nation's veterans and a combined federal/state effort is required.

While the "Independent Budget" was impressed with the manner in which the Department of Memorial Affairs is being managed, a slight increase of 35 FTEE's was recommended. This recommended increase is predicated on the growing demands which will fall upon the cemetery system.

PVA, as expressed in the "Independent Budget," has no problem with the Administration's proposal to move funding of the graveliner program from General Operating Expenses to the Veterans Insurance and Indemnities appropriation.

In addition, last fall, the Congress approved legislation, now law, which established a commission to review all military facilities and recommend, based on certain criteria, which facilities could be excessed or closed as a cost-saving measure. The Commission submitted its report on December 31, 1988. The report identified 145 installations, including 86 for closure, 5 for partial closure and 54 others for realignment.

A close examination of the "Base Closure" list very well could identify certain facilities, which, if excessed, could be available to be used to expand the DVA's cemetery system.

H.R. 1414

SECTION 1. MEMBERSHIP ON AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENT COMMISSION

PVA supports the amendment to title 36, U.S.C. 121 by striking out "commissioned officers" in the third sentence and inserting in lieu thereof "members".

This amendment is self-explanatory and appropriate, otherwise the existing situation, if not corrected, could be interpreted as deprecating the enlisted service of millions of American men and women. These veterans certainly should not be precluded from Commission service due to their paygrade of, perhaps, as long ago as forty years, but should be considered on the basis of current qualifications.

Mr. Chairman this concludes our statement. Again, thank you; and I will be glad to answer any questions that I can.

STATEMENT OF

JAMES N. MAGILL, DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

OVERSIGHT OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

WASHINGTON, D. C. APRIL 13, 1989

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the privilege of appearing before this distinguished Subcommittee to present the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States with respect to oversight of the National Cemetery System, Arlington National Cemetery and a bill which would provide for the appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Forces to the American Battle Monuments Commission. The VFW is appreciative of this Subcommittee for holding this hearing, demonstrating its continuing concern and commitment in honoring our nation's veterans.

Public Law 100-322, the "Veterans' Health-Care Amendments Act," authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide graveliners for use in national cemeteries. In a hearing before this Subcommittee during the 100th Congress, the VFW voiced its support of the use of graveliners in the National Cemetery System. To date, Department of Veterans Affairs cemeteries in four states are presently installing graveliners and their cost-effectiveness is being borne out by the reduction of sinking graves, tilting headstones and the lessening of the chance visitors could receive injury while at a national cemetery. Of course, the benefits of graveliners also enhance the esthetic quality at our national cemeteries. It is our understanding six additional national cemeteries will be installing graveliners this year. We support this action and would encourage all active and future national cemeteries to utilize graveliners.

Although Arlington National Cemetery falls under the authority of the Department of the Army and not the Department of Veterans Affairs, we note Public Law 100-322 also authorizes the Secretary of the Army to use graveliners. We totally support this action and recommend its immediate implementation.

Mr. Chairman, H.R. 1414 (introduced by you) would provide for the appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Forces to serve on the American Battle Monuments Commission. The Commission is responsible for commemorating the services of American Armed Forces through the erection of suitable memorial shrines and for designing, constructing, operating and maintaining permanent American military burial grounds in foreign countries. Inasmuch as the responsibility of the Commission is to honor all members of the Armed Forces, officers and enlisted, we believe it most fitting that enlisted personnel be appointed to the Commission. Therefore, the VFW supports the enactment of H.R. 1414.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, in your letter of invitation, we were asked to comment on the existing workloads and future expansion plans of the National Cemetery System. Currently, the system is witnessing an increased interment rate of three to four percent a year. Of course, as the average age of the veteran population increases so will the demand on the Department of Veterans Affairs increase. Not only will this demand call for the expansion of existing cemeteries and the opening of new ones but existing staff levels must be increased to accommodate this growing demand.

On April 1, 1989, the Department of Veterans Affairs began operating its 113th national cemetery following the transfer to federal jurisdiction of the

Arizona National Memorial Cemetery and a new cemetery will be dedicated in the San Joaquin Valley in 1991. Also, four Environmental Impact Studies are currently in progress for cemeteries in Chicago, Cleveland, Albany/ Utica and Seattle. The VFW strongly recommends that once these studies are completed that the Congress immediately fund these much needed projects so construction may commence in a timely fashion. It is also our understanding that six additional Environmental Impact Studies are waiting for funding. Again, we would urge the Congress to appropriate the required funding so these studies may proceed.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I reiterate the VFW's long-standing resolution to provide an open National Cemetery in every state. Because a great number of national cemeteries are closed, the survivors of eligible veterans are forced either to seek the veterans' interment far from home or through other sources--generally at greater expense. We believe that providing an open national cemetery in every state is the responsibility of the Federal Government inasmuch as veterans were inducted into military service by that government. We would also suggest that in the design plans for future cemeteries that more consideration be given to the construction of columbariums. As we all know, available space for casketed interments is limited. By making columbariums available, more veterans may be interred in a national cemetery.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman, and I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have. Thank you.

AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION
Three Skyline Place, Suite 1111, 5201 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, Virginia 22041 • (703) 379-5838

Testimony of

James E. Watkins, Jr.

American Cemetery Association

Before the

Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs

Committee on Veterans' Affairs

U.S. House of Representatives

With Respect to

The National Cemetery System and Related Burial Benefits

April 13, 1989

Chairman Staggers and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is James E. Watkins, Jr. and I am here today on behalf of the American Cemetery Association. I am a past president of the American Cemetery Association (ACA) and a past president of the Indiana State Cemetery Association. Besides being a second-generation cemeterian, I served with the Strategic Air Command as navigator and separated with the rank of Captain. I am also a member of the American Legion.

We appreciate this opportunity to testify this morning and request that the complete text of our written testimony be made part of the record of today's hearing. At the conclusion of my testimony, I will be glad to answer any questions from you and the Subcommittee members.

The American Cemetery Association is a national trade association which represents approximately 2,000 members including municipal, religious, and private cemeteries. The ACA respectfully submits its views on the potential expansion of the National Cemetery System and related burial benefits.

Cost Avoidance in Planning Future Cemeteries

Recent news stories, such as the Washington Post report of March 15, 1989, have highlighted the budgetary problems facing the VA especially in the area of health care. We would hope that the pressing need to prioritize funding for the most critical VA programs would initiate a thorough review by Congress of cost avoidance in others areas.

Of continuing concern to the ACA is the escalating costs of operating the 113 cemeteries which constitute the National Cemetery System and the tentative plans to fund the construction of at least four new cemeteries. There have been no detailed studies made, to our knowledge, for determining the exact costs of operating this system in the future. Furthermore, VA demographic trends indicating that the veteran population level will decline in future years create the troublesome prospect of expensive VA facilities, including national cemeteries, serving significantly fewer veterans after the year 2000.

At one point in time the VA did conduct a burial reservation program for veterans but the program was discontinued in 1962. At present, the Veterans Department is uncertain how many of the 27.8 million veterans alive today wish to be buried in a national cemetery. Moreover, burial preferences of the Vietnam-era veterans is speculative at best. These factors in combination with the decline in the veteran population increase the likelihood that national cemeteries could eventually be regarded as monuments to wasted resources and extravagance instead of the shrines for honoring the war dead. We urge the Congress to review the overall cost structure of the National Cemetery System, the need for cost avoidance in future funding proposals, and available alternatives for our veteran population.

Escalating Costs of Cemetery Operation

All cemeteries, regardless of whether they are operated by private, government or religious interests, share one common problem: constantly rising maintenance expenses involving gravesites and markers, road repairs, water and drainage systems, and related administrative activities. These costs will continue to escalate in future years due to increased labor expenses, equipment replacement and the uncertain effects of future inflation.

There is a critical difference, however, in the way non-governmental cemeteries meet these expenses compared to veterans cemeteries. Forty-seven states require endowment care trusts whereby cemeteries deposit into an irrevocable trust a percentage of the sales price of each lot, usually a minimum of ten percent, the income of which is used to pay <u>future</u> maintenance costs. This requirement also prevents private cemeteries from eventually becoming, in effect, wards of the state.

By contrast, the National Cemetery System has no such trust fund and must rely solely on outlays of Federal tax dollars each year, indefinitely, to meet these continually rising expenses. An expanded Federal cemetery system only increases this problem.

For example, the preliminary VA minor construction program for cemeteries in the 1989 budget highlights this problem. The program accounts for maintenance projects in only 28 of the National Cemetery System's 113 cemeteries, yet the budget totals $5.7 million. The specific projects,

however, are typical of the expenses faced by all cemeteries. One national cemetery needs a quarter of a million dollars just to seal its asphalt roads; another requires an equal amount for concrete road repairs, while a third will need $700,000 for more road and curb repairs. As cemeteries age, their maintenance costs increase, similar to other physical plants and equipment, whether or not they are open or closed to future interments.

The ACA urges Congress to direct the appropriate Federal agencies, including the General Accounting Office, to conduct a comprehensive study in order to determine the actual price tag for running the world's largest cemetery system. Without this information, Congress is deprived of the means of making critical decisions regarding funding priorities and future cost avoidance inherent in the National Cemetery System.

The Inconsistent Policy of Burial Benefits

According to VA figures, less than 15 percent of veterans eligible for burial benefits choose national cemetery interment at the time of death. While the construction of additional VA cemeteries would undoubtedly increase this percentage, the VA itself has long recognized the impracticality of constructing and maintaining cemeteries within 50 miles of every major veteran population center, the historic radius beyond which national cemetery use significantly declines.

In addition, when the National Cemetery System was transferred to the VA in 1973, Congress recognized that veterans' cemeteries did not exist in a vacuum but were meant to operate in conjunction with cemeteries already existing in the private, municipal and religious sectors. By creating alternate forms of burial benefits, such as the burial and plot allowances, Congress sought to encourage veterans and their families to use these resources as their preferences indicated. These burial benefits also served to relieve the burial caseload in the national cemeteries. The critical difference here is that the burial allowance is a one-time payment by the Federal Government whereas interment in a national cemetery creates a continuing financial obligation by the Federal Government to maintain each gravesite forever.

For example, present law restricts the burial allowance to those veterans receiving VA compensation or pensions, or who died as a result of a service-connected disability. Interment in national cemeteries, however, is available to all honorably-discharged veterans and many of their dependents. Thus, the most cost-effective of burial benefits, the burial allowance, is the most restrictive in terms of eligibility while the most expensive benefit, interment in a national cemetery, is the most broadly applied. The ACA proposes that if Congress increased the burial and plot allowances, grave inventory in the national cemetery cemeteries would be preserved well beyond the current projected figures. A policy of coordinating burial benefits consistent with their original objectives will reduce the number of interments in national cemeteries, resulting in a corresponding reduction in maintenance expenses for future years.

The Financial Burden of State Veterans Cemeteries

VA officials have testified that the State Cemetery Grant Program has not been as popular as anticipated due to the concern in various states with the financial burden of ongoing maintenance costs. After being awarded VA funds to establish state cemeteries, many states are directly dependent upon more Federal assistance for the continued operations of these cemeteries. Unlike the care trusts required by most states for private cemeteries, the state veterans cemeteries rely on outlays of tax dollars similar to the Federal Government.

Our members have confirmed the perceptions of VA officials that state legislators are aware of the dangers of ever-increasing maintenance expenses connected with state cemeteries and that many legislators are concerned with the so-called "cradle-to-grave" concept of veterans benefits as developed by the Federal Government. The ACA strongly urges that any revised policy affecting the future of the National Cemetery System includes the development of a closer working relationship with private cemeteries to provide burial benefits for local veterans as one alternative to the state cemetery grant program. Last year, Congress passed H.R. 2616 which removed the percentage cap on the amount of the VA state cemetery grants, and also authorized

the VA to assume responsibility for the Arizona state veterans cemetery, now the 113th national cemetery. Thus, Congress provided increased incentives for the states to construct their own cemeteries while setting a precedent for the Federal Government to assume responsibility for these same cemeteries later on. The ACA believes that the mechanism for the ultimate failure of the state cemetery program has been set into motion as a result of this legislation while alternatives have yet to be explored.

As a result, in addition to the significant yet undocumented costs in maintaining the National Cemetery System forever, the contingent financial liability facing the Federal Government from the state veterans cemeteries has been totally neglected. The ACA proposes that in view of the tremendous ongoing federal deficits facing the nation in general, and the serious budgetary problems facing the VA in particular, a prioritization of veterans' needs and benefits should be developed immediately.

Finally, the ACA proposes that Congress, in conjunction with the President and the Department of Veterans Affairs, appoint a blue ribbon commission of government and industry experts to make recommendations regarding the future of the National Cemetery System including its cost structure. The ACA would be pleased to participate on such a commission and to contribute the expertise of our industry leaders for the benefit of veterans, the Government, and the taxpayers. Thank you.

CHANDLER-
WILBERT
VAULT CO.
SINCE 1921

LUCY CHANDLER LAKE
President
Chief Executive Officer

CHRISTOPHER CHANDLER BROWN
Executive Vice President
Chief Operations Officer

JERRY I. BROWN
Executive Vice President
Marketing/Industry Relations

NATIONAL CONCRETE BURIAL VAULT ASSOCIATION'S POSITION
SUMMARY REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT GRAVELINER POLICY
OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

for

Congressional Subcommittee
on Housing and Veterans'
Affairs
April 13, 1989

MANUFACTURING PLANTS:
MINNESOTA
Austin
Faribault
Lakeville
Mankato
Morris
Redwood Falls
St. Cloud
St. Paul
Winona
NORTH DAKOTA
Fargo
Jamestown
WISCONSIN
Chippewa Falls
DePere
Milwaukee
Sun Prairie
Sparta

DISTRIBUTORSHIP:
SOUTH DAKOTA
Aberdeen

1. The recently adopted policy of Memorial Affairs to require OUTER-BURIAL RECEPTACLES for interments within the National Cemetery System was appropriate for the following reasons:

   A. Fiscal
   B. Ongoing maintenance
   C. Continued beautification of cemeteries
   D. Safety (potential liability for personal injuries)
   E. Dignity (disinterments/relocation under Public Law 99-576)
   F. Health considerations

2. The decision to revert back to the "Government Graveliner Program" (contracts let on bid) of the mid 1970's is, in our view , unsound for the following reasons:

   a. Fiscal. . . significant capital costs and budgetary problems which prompted the OMB to cancel the Government Graveliner Program back in 1980.

   b. Reflects a clear case of more 'government intervention' into the private enterprise system, i.e. over 90% of the nation's private/public and denominational cemeteries require outer-burial receptacles with the traditional procurement of these receptacles being next-of-kin vis-a-vis the Funeral Establishment and commercial Burial Vault Manufacturer.

   c. Escalates the perceived (if not real) discriminatory benefit system and inequality in the eyes of the nation's veterans insofar as the National Cemetery System is concerned.

   In view of the fact that approximately 450,000 Veterans

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are dying annually and of this number an estimated 54,000 are being interred in National Cemeteries (20% dependents and 17% cremation), it is obvious that 88% of Veterans' burials are in private sector cemeteries.

For the sake of example, let us say that a highly decorated World War II veteran dies in his home town of Antelope Junction, Wyoming. Because the two nearest National Cemeteries are hundreds of miles away (Ft. Logan, Colorado and Black Hills National), this war veteran is buried in the Antelope Junction Village Cemetery and his next-of-kin receives $150.00 burial benefit and a grave marker (setting charge not included) as the total of the deceased's veterans burial benefits.

Conversely, let us hypothesize a situation where a former Conscientious Objector, who was forced to serve in the Armed Forces,dies in Minneapolis, Mn and is buried in Ft. Snelling National Cemetery. Because he was fortunate enough to live and die within the purview of a National Cemetery, this person was eligible for a grave space; opening and closing of grave; perpetual care of grave; cemetery marker and most recently, A GOVERNMENT GRAVELINER if a burial vault was not selected, ALL AT NO COST TO NEXT-OF-KIN.

d. Therefore, in order to achieve a policy which would be equitable and beneficial to all concerned (especially the 88% who do not use the National Cemetery System), NCBVA recommends that the Veterans burial allowance be increased (with outer-burial receptacle sum designated) which would cover the average retail cost of a minimum grave liner selected from the Funeral Home or could be used to apply to or defray the retail cost of any other type of burial vault or interment receptacle to be selected by the next-of-kin from the Funeral Establishment of choice.

e. Finally, NCBVA recommends that mandatory burial receptacles within the National Cemetery System be perpetuated and the present Government Graveliner program be abolished for reasons stated above.

Respectfully submitted,

Jerry J. Brown, Chairman
National Concrete Burial Vault Ass'n/Veterans
Cemetery Committee

April 13, 1989

REMARKS BY HONORABLE GERALD SOLOMON BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING & MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

THANK YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN.

I WELCOME THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON A MATTER OF GRAVE CONCERN.

AS YOU KNOW, A NEW VISITORS' CENTER AND PARKING FACILITY WAS OPENED AT ARLINGTON IN JANUARY OF THIS YEAR, AND A PARKING FEE WAS IMPOSED AT THE FACILITY.

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY IS A SHRINE, THE RESTING PLACE OF TWO PRESIDENTS, TWO SUPREME COURT JUSTICES, AND IS A TESTIMONIAL TO THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND SACRIFICES OF THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE MADE OUR COUNTRY WHAT IT IS TODAY -- FREE AND INDEPENDENT.

I PERSONALLY FEEL THAT CHARGING A PARKING FEE TO VISITORS AT ARLINGTON CEMETERY IS A DISGRACE. THEREFORE, I HAVE INTRODUCED LEGISLATION WHICH WOULD PROHIBIT THE CHARGING OF SUCH FEES AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY.

THANK YOU, AGAIN, MR. CHAIRMAN, FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS MY VIEWS ON THIS ISSUE BEFORE YOUR SUBCOMMITTEE.

HONORABLE LEWIS F. PAYNE, JR.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

April 13, 1989

MR. CHAIRMAN, thank you very much for providing this opportunity to learn about the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Service, Arlington National Cemetery and HR 1414, which would provide for appointment of enlisted members of the Armed Services to the America Battle Monuments Commission.

For over 100 years, our government has provided for the permanent burial grounds for men and women who have served our great nation. It is very important that we continue to provide for the interment of eligible veterans and their dependents, and I am very pleased that we are addressing the present system as well as possible improvements.

I look forward to hearing the testimony today and appreciate all that has been done to ensure that our veterans will have a suitable final resting place available to them.

STATEMENT BY CONGRESSMAN MARTIN FROST

BEFORE THE HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

April 13, 1989

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the need for the expansion of the National Cemetery System in the Dallas/Fort Worth area -- an issue of great importance to the veterans of North Texas. Many civic as well as veterans organizations in the Dallas/Fort Worth area are seeking federal funds for the establishment of a national cemetery in North Texas. Having organized several meetings in my District over the last year to discuss the cemetery proposal, I have come to appreciate the need for additional burial space for these veterans and their families.

Texas has the third largest veterans population in the country behind California and New York. In its 1987 report to Congress on the national cemetery system, the Veterans Administration documented that, while the overall veteran population is decreasing, eleven States -- including Texas -- show an increase in veteran population due to migration. Moreover, Dallas/Fort Worth ranks seventh on the Veterans Administration's list of the ten geographic areas in which the need for additional burial space is greatest. Congress authorized the establishment of a national cemetery in Dallas/Fort Worth in P.L. 99-576. The need for a new facility is based on the fact that the concentrated veterans population in North Texas is <u>not</u> being served by an open cemetery facility.

According to the Veterans Administration, 31 percent of all Texas veterans reside in the 44 counties surrounding the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area; that equals approximately 995,000 veterans and spouses who live within 100 miles of Dallas/Fort Worth. Yet the national cemeteries that are open to these veterans in Texas -- the El Paso, Houston and San Antonio cemeteries -- are more than 300 miles away. The Veterans Administration has demonstrated that there is a direct relationship between the extent to which veterans use national cemetery facilities and the distance from their homes. It is not reasonable to ask the families of veterans in North Texas to travel over 300 miles to inter their loved ones.

Even if North Texas veterans were willing to be interred hundreds of miles away from their families, it is important to note that, according to the Veterans Administration, there are only 35,612 casket and cremain sites available in the three open national cemeteries for all Texas veterans and their spouses. Clearly this availability poses a real threat to the burial needs

of the nearly 995,000 veterans and spouses who live in North Texas. Furthermore, one of the three open cemeteries in Texas -- the San Antonio facility -- is expected to close in the year 2002. The other two facilities are expected to close by the year 2030. While the Veterans Administration has not recommended that the National Cemetery System be expanded, clearly the projected increases in demand for burial in national cemeteries coupled with the inevitable closures of currently open national cemeteries make it important to begin preparing for veterans' future burial needs.

It is for these reasons that I have requested that the House Appropriations Subcommittee on VA/HUD/INDEPENDENT AGENCIES include funds for the preliminary stage of the establishment of a national cemetery in the Dallas/Fort Worth area in its Fiscal Year 1990 Appropriations bill. An Environmental Impact Study at a cost of not less than $200,000 is required by statute for the Veterans Administration to evaluate the potential sites for a new cemetery facility. The study, which will evaluate the soil conditions, flood potential, transportation and air quality of potential sites, generally takes 18 to 24 months.

I would like to be able to tell the many veterans who have contacted me about this project that the federal government is sympathetic to their burial needs and committed to providing them the facilities in which they can take full advantage of their burial benefits. For those who may argue that our nation's budget crisis relegates projects such as the construction of national cemeteries to the lowest of priorities, I have to argue that the need for this project has been well documented by the Veterans Administration, by Congress and by various veterans organizations. And if the responsibility for establishing policies and priorities is not shared between the Administration, Congress and the private sector, than what entity is responsible?

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the need for the expansion of the National Cemetery System in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

MARTIN FROST, M.C.

Office of the
Administrator
of Veterans Affairs

Washington DC 20420

Veterans
Administration

MAY 18 1989

Honorable G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery
Chairman, Committee on Veterans'
Affairs
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Enclosed please find the Department's responses to questions raised by Representative Dan Burton following the April 13, 1989, hearing on the National Cemetery System. A copy of these responses has been provided to Representative Burton.

Sincerely yours,

Edward J. Derwinski
Secretary

Enclosure

cc: Honorable Dan Burton

QUESTION:

Are there other environmental impact studies waiting for funding in addition to the four already under way and Ft. Sheridan?

ANSWER:

VA is preparing Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for proposed national cemeteries in four locations -- Chicago, Cleveland, Seattle/Tacoma and Albany. These studies were mandated by Congress in the FY 1988 Continuing Resolution. Additional funds would need to be provided for design and construction of cemeteries at those locations.

VA has no plans to initiate additional Environmental Impact Statements. We are aware, however, that Rep. Martin Frost has contacted the Appropriations Committee regarding EIS funding for a proposed national cemetery in Dallas/Ft. Worth.

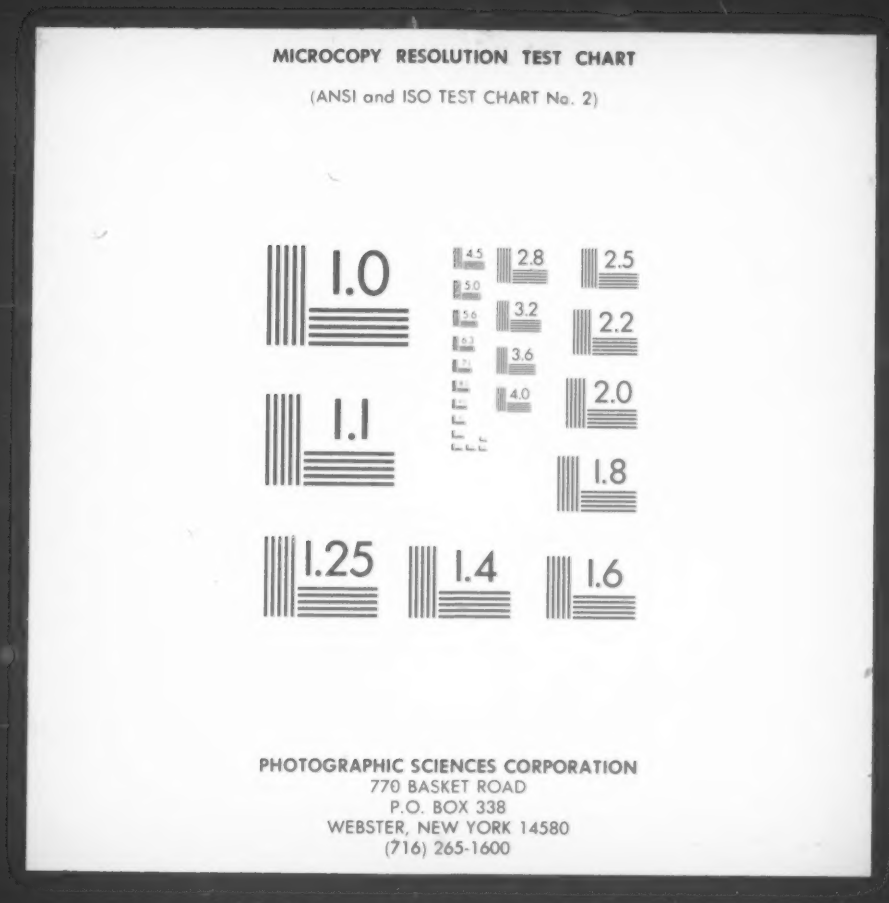
With regard to Ft. Sheridan, VA is eager to assume responsibility for the post cemetery, as recommended in the Defense Secretary's Base Closing Commission Report. We are exploring the possibility of acquiring 40-50 acres of land adjacent to the post cemetery, so that additional service to veterans can be provided. An EIS is being prepared to evaluate possible sites for serving the long term burial needs of veterans in the Chicago area.

QUESTION:

There are concerns expressed by several witnesses that the national cemetery system is not expanding at a rate which will keep pace with the future needs of the aging veteran population. Do you believe with the current resources and present plans for the future, the Department of Veterans Affairs can do so?

ANSWER:

In June 1987, a study of the National Cemetery System was submitted to Congress in accordance with Public Law 99-576. As a result of that study, a policy review was conducted regarding meeting future demands upon the National Cemetery System. A policy document was prepared and discussed within the administration. This is a complex issue and it was examined from a number of perspectives. It was decided that the regional concept would remain the policy of the National Cemetery System. Expansion under the regional concept was completed with the opening of Ft. Mitchell National Cemetery in Alabama, and no 1990 or future year funding is requested for the planning, design, or construction of new cemeteries. Under this approach, veterans' future burial needs would continue to be met by phased development of presently undeveloped land in existing national cemeteries, expansion of existing national cemeteries through acquisition of adjacent land where practical, ensuring that one large national cemetery is open in each of the 10 standard Federal Regions and in the Washington, D.C. area, and encouragement of expanded participation in the State Cemetery Grant program.



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